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ABSTRACT

Suburban high school seniors planning to attend universities, as well as parents, high school guidance counselors, and teachers at both the high school and college levels are the intended audience for this guide. It seeks to provide incoming freshmen with "everything you need to know about the first-year college experience" in a lively and entertaining style. In order to do this, 50 students who attended 23 colleges and universities were interviewed. Ten were from the suburb of Weston, Connecticut, and the other 40 were from suburbs around the United States. All students had completed their first-year at college, and were willing to share their anecdotes, reflections, and insights. A wide variety of topics are addressed, including academics, becoming oriented, campus life, safety, and financial matters. The book also furnishes readers with information and suggestions that have been gleaned from education and student personnel professionals, particularly in the "Tips" sections which end most chapters. However, its primary focus is upon the first-hand personal material given by those students interviewed. Contains an index. (TS)

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Starting Out Suburban

A Frosh Year Survival Guide

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Finally, here is a book that tells the real story of the first year experience and how to manage it. Money, roommates, fear and longing for freedom—all the issues are covered. This book must be read by every prospective student, their parents, college counselors and advisors.

—Abby J. Hirsch, Director of Pupil Services, Somers Schools, NY

In a lively and entertaining style, **Starting Out Suburban** rings true with the suburban experience and provides valuable insight into the world and feelings of college freshmen. Especially important are the idea of a student starting fresh and the first year's effect on the whole family. College can be a hard road; this is a great road map.

—Shirley A. Bloomquist, Director of Guidance, Thomas Jefferson High School for Science & Technology, Alexandria, VA

This book is a winner! Some of the most interesting statements come from minority students who grew up in suburbia and are now confronted with their status in a very different setting.

—Vincent L. Ferrandino, Executive Director, New England Association of Schools & Colleges, Inc.

What a reassuring guide for students and parents, written with wit and full of practical advice.

—Leah Johnson Smith, consultant and former Assistant to the President and Dean, Swarthmore College, PA

A book of inestimable value for students who are embarking upon one of the most challenging and rewarding experiences of modern life.

—John D. Lavery, Professor of Psychology, Marymount College, Tarrytown, NY

Starting Out Suburban

A Frosh Year Survival Guide

Linda Pollard Puner

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STARTING OUT SUBURBAN:
A FROSH YEAR SURVIVAL GUIDE
By LINDA POLLARD PUNER

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Starting Out Suburban has been written to inform and entertain. All facts in this book have been carefully researched. However, inevitably errors, inaccuracies, omissions and inconsistencies will occur. The author and publisher have neither liability nor responsibility to any person or entity for any loss or damage caused, directly or indirectly, by the information in this book. In addition, colleges, universities and students are organic and constantly changing. Information about them was true at the writing date.

For all those suburban students who think they're onlies, the only one who wants to break away but still stay around, the only one who doesn't know much about love, sex, drinking, drugs, poetry or calculus, take heart. You are unique, but you're not alone.

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PART

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The End of the World as They Knew it

CHAPTER

Careful What You Wish, It Just Came True

Congratulations, suburban high school senior, you're in! Years of hard work in the classroom and on the playing fields, hours of extracurricular activities and community service have paid off. Prepping for SATs, touring campuses, sweating over the meaning of life on college applications were all worth it. A reputable higher-learning institution has declared you acceptable, and maybe even welcomed you with some financial aid. Way to go!

No wonder you feel exhilarated and raring to go. Perennially, "We Got To Get Out Of This Place," blasts through graduation parties with the crowd joyously joining in on, "There's a better place for you and me."

Indeed, by senior year, idyllic suburban shelter can feel claustrophobic. Seniors have done it all—taken all the courses and rec department activities, driven all the roads, met all the people. The neat lawns and homes, clean air and safe streets seem as boring as the cookie cutter, conventional neighbors.

Suburban seniors know everybody and everything about their towns, and equally limiting, everybody knows them. Cut even one class and mom's best friend spots you at Burger King. Buy anything exotic at the drug store and half the school knows in an hour. One fed up suburban Detroit student once asked his neighbor, "And how am I today?"

A senior may also be typecast. Maybe she vomited at the fourth grade picnic or ratted on the smokers in ninth grade. Maybe he

was called the Brain or the Jock, but he was more than that or had changed through the years. Suburban memories are long and unforgiving.

An Emory student from suburban Dallas recalled, "When I was in high school, people would say when I mentioned certain things like guy hunting, 'You're not the kind of person to do that.' I'd think, 'Well, maybe I am, otherwise why would I have said it.' But after a while, you just fall into your role."

Suburban roles can be narrow and rigid because of homogeneous and stable populations. "You can't really change," noted Kristen Gschwind, who attended Weston, CT schools from fourth through twelfth grade and went to Lehigh University. "People might kind of accept it, but they also make fun of it."

Some students have the same teachers as their older siblings and, in some cases, their parents. So a student may remain "the baby Kelly" long past puberty or another one of the musical Nortons even if she prefers soccer to the sax.

On the other hand, being labeled "a good student" or "a good kid" can help. The paper scribbled off in the cafeteria earned an A because the teacher was conditioned by previous good work. When the cops arrive at the suburban keg parties, minors often get off with a warning because they're known as nice kids from good families.

College acceptance is a ticket to freedom from these stereotypes. Maybe that's why Josh Jacobson, so focused and unflappable in high school that he was called Iceman, danced on a cafeteria table when he found out he was in at the U. S. Naval Academy. And Amy Frankel, who was home alone when she got an acceptance to her reach school, University of Vermont, couldn't believe her good luck and showed the letter to her dog for confirmation.

But if getting into college is so great, why do so many suburban students have a little knot of uncertainty in their stomachs?

When Tim Douglas sang a slowed-down, melancholy version of R.E.M.'s "It's The End Of The World As We Know It" at graduation, a classmate gasped, "Oh god, it's true!" The rest of the class collectively sighed.

The sense of loss may be because just when students have mastered the system—climbing from clueless ninth graders to savvy seniors—they must start over again. Finding your way around cam-

pus, making new friends, establishing an identity, getting along with a roommate or roommates, balancing work and fun, handling finances all seem so daunting.

Or maybe it's because suburban life is conventional and limiting, but it is also known, manageable and comfortable.

"Life is all connections," explained Tim, heading for Emerson College, "knowing where and who you fit in with. In high school, I made my connections. I will miss knowing exactly where to go if I need anything."

"Being a senior in high school is the perfect time," added Gretchen Anderson before leaving for Wesleyan University. "You're not really a kid or an adult, and you're with your friends all the time."

These students are leaving hot meals, clean laundry, quiet rooms for study, privacy, access to a car and, as a first-year Lehigh University student from Newton, MA recalled, "Your mom returning your J. Crew mistakes."

As for other mistakes, after the initial rush of acceptance, many students have second thoughts about their college choices. Too big, too small, too close, too faraway, too hard, too too. A few confessed they hadn't thought beyond acceptance to actually attending college.

Finally, some students felt duped by the college entrance process's illusion of freedom. Getting in seemed like one more step in their carefully orchestrated lives from tennis lessons to Advanced Placement Physics. After all, going to college is a suburban given.

Bruce Stempien, guidance director at Weston (CT) High School, noted, "The question is not, 'Do I want to go to college?' It is, 'Which college do I want to go to?' "

As Kody Scott, a Los Angeles teenager whose gang name was Monster, wrote in his autobiography, "To be in a gang in South Central when I joined is the equivalent of growing up in Grosse Pointe, Michigan, and going to college: everyone does it."

The 50 students in this book did it. Ten students named here are from Weston, CT, a picture-perfect suburb that represents the best and worst of what many frosh try to escape and hold on to. Forty other first-year students, who are not named, are from suburbs around the country. In all, the students attended 23 schools from Maine to California. The overwhelming reaction to frosh year was, "It wasn't what I thought." Here's what it was like.

CHAPTER

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Wishes, Worries and Last Words

The students who agreed to participate and are named in this book are like you or your neighbor or the kid sitting next to you in American History. They are good kids, whatever that means, but they are not perfect. Some did tons of school work; some did the minimum. Most were smart but not necessarily classroom whizzes. All had friends, but they weren't the most or least popular in the class. Not one was a prototypical rich kid, but money, before they left for college, wasn't a major worry for them either. Other stereotypes they steered clear of were headbanger, grunge patrol, super prep, meathead and teacher's pet. But there were elements of these extremes in them.

What they did and what happened to them the first year at college is similar for many suburban students. Their advice may not save you from pink underwear, broken hearts or failed exams. But it could, or at least it will help you through the rough times by knowing how others survived.

Here are their wishes, worries and last words the summer before frosh year. Follow them through the year and see how college worked out and what you can expect.

Wish One: Time Out

Getting into college is such a treadmill in the suburbs. Students say the pressure to perform in academics and extracurriculars starts as

early as sixth grade and speeds up through high school, culminating in the frantic senior year. Receiving the actual acceptance feels like the end of an arduous journey. Some students hope college is a chance to stop and take a breath.

Gretchen Anderson's yearbook photo is a shot of herself flying superimposed over skyscrapers. In high school she was Superkid and did it all—honor society, theater, four varsity letters, senior class president, literary magazine.

"Probably a lot of people thought I was a real overachiever, worker-type because I was in all this stuff," said the cheerful Janis Joplin look-alike who favors black clothes, silver jewelry and a baseball cap. "But people had the impression that I was more the school spirit, cheerleader-type than I am."

As Gretchen sat in her bedroom packing a semester's worth of Trident and Tampax, she looked forward to a less rah-rah life at Wesleyan University. "I won't miss the whole hectic, always having to be somewhere, going to bed way too late, getting up early, always having way too much to do and not enough time to do it. College will be different because I probably won't be doing a lot of things I don't care about."

Wish Two: Fun

"Everyone tells me I'm going to have fun and learn a lot," said Peter Scott, who leaves a cozy, 500-student high school for 30,000-student University of Wisconsin in Madison. "I hope it's true."

Peter, a violin-playing linebacker who is an altar boy but whose eyes twinkle with mischief of his former sixth-grade bad boy self, "I was the wildest kid you'd want to know," he admitted.

Peter has had to toe the line at home. "My parents are strict, but not the kind of strict that makes their kids hate them," he explained. "I'll probably raise my kids the same way. But I'll make a few more exceptions to the rules than my dad."

For example, in twelfth grade, Peter's weekend curfew was midnight, going out during the week was verboten and, no matter what, he had to get up by 9:30 a.m. on Sundays to do his chores. "Maybe 10 a.m. if they were in good moods," he joked.

Despite his strict upbringing, Peter had no fears of falling apart away from home. He said, "I've already gone through that phase."

Wish Three: Excitement

"Boondockesque." Tim Douglas described his small town. He was eager to be off to Boston's Emerson College, which specializes in theater arts. Tim is an actor and singer whose graduation song predicted the end of suburban comfort and security.

That's not all bad, he explained. "I haven't been really miserable in the suburbs. But I've felt like this is the peaceful part away from where everything is happening. I want to be where it's happening."

He added, "I don't think I'll ever move back to the suburbs because I really don't want a house or kids. I've always wanted a big loft apartment. Unless there's a loft in the suburbs somewhere, I won't be coming back."

Mac Priebe chose Emory University on the outskirts of Atlanta "because I wanted to be near an interesting city with good sports teams, and I wanted someplace warm and sort of touristy where there are lots of things to do."

He hoped Emory would offer more than the general hanging out with friends, movies and diner scene of suburban life. "People say they move here for the kids. But it's not so great for kids," he said. "Suburban kids have a lot less freedom than city kids. Until they get their (driver's) licenses they can't go anywhere without their parents knowing about it. And then where they go is so boring, who cares if the parents know."

As class clown, Mac tried to create excitement through his underground humor magazine and did manage a few memorable hits by being banned from the school library and doing World Series Baseball during Calculus. But wearing a San Francisco earthquake T-shirt and standing between life-sized cardboard figures of Geroge Bush and Saddam Hussein in his yearbook picture, Mac planned to take his place among world class jokers in college.

Wish Four: Getting Real

White bread is the way many students describe their hometowns, meaning literally and metaphorically colorless. Students of color and ethnic diversity, who may have been tiny minorities in their suburbs, anticipate meeting more students like themselves at college. Some are eager and others are anxious about this new expe-

rience, but all feel campuses are truer representatives of the world than the suburbs.

It's easy to pick out Kathy Lipscomb in the school pictures on her bedroom walls. In the Weston photos, she is the one black cheerleader in a sea of white legs and faces. In the Sunnyvale, CA—where she lived until two and a half years ago—shots, she is the single smiling black face in a circle of grinning Asian faces. Does she notice? "Sometimes I do, but mostly I don't," she said. "If I always thought of myself as the different one, I'd be a pretty lonely person."

As an African-American, Kathy will be less alone at Stanford University, although she claimed she didn't primarily chose the school for its substantial minority population.

Kathy did look forward to living in a more realistic society. "While a lot of people here know most places aren't like Weston—not so comfortably small town, wealthy, with lots of natural beauty—they don't realize how different other parts are."

Several students said they were eager to participate in real world issues. Gretchen at Wesleyan and Peter at Wisconsin wanted to live in politically charged atmospheres, where active debate and questioning the status quo are encouraged. "I just wouldn't want to go to a college that was exactly the same as where I went to high school. It would be boring. I decided to go where the kids were really different and into different things, and where there was a lot of activity and concern for the outside world," Gretchen said.

She predicted, "After a week there the whole Wesleyan thing will be going to work on me. Since it's a place where everybody is really aware of issues that are now, I'll probably have my eyes opened."

Amy, bound for University of Vermont, bridled against suburban isolationism. "A lot of kids here are in their own world. They don't watch the news or read newspapers. They're concerned about what Joe said to Larry." She expected a wider view at college.

Along with social and political reality, suburban students anticipate real learning that will lead to careers.

Since fifth grade, Peter has wanted to be a naval engineer. Struggling through high school Spanish wasn't part of his plan. "The

book we used was so out of date that the kids in it wore bell-bottoms. I had to memorize the word for fortune telling parrot. I mean, come on, where am I ever going to use that? Let's get real here," he said, adding, "The main reason I can't wait to get to college is that I can start learning about things I want to learn about."

Josh expected the real thing from the U. S. Naval Academy. He was willing to submit himself to the grueling training because, "It sucks to be at Annapolis, but it's a great place to be from." After ten years—four at school and six in the Navy—he feels he will have the credentials to do whatever he wants. Meanwhile, surviving the Academy is a matter of pride to the clean-cut blond who already has the chiseled plebe look. "The first time home, I'm going to go into school with the uniform and the whole bit. I know I'm going to see everybody still there and the same. I'll think, 'Why haven't you gotten on with your life?'"

Wish Five: Freedom

Despite the wide open spaces of many suburbs, students report feeling pinched by community values and expectations and, most of all, family scrutiny. College can be the great escape.

Athletic, academically successful, heart shape-faced Kristen grew up so American Dream perfect that her friend Tim joked, "They must have a 4 child hidden away somewhere" to match the statistically correct family.

Growing up perfect can be a strain, and Kristen, on her way to her dad's alma mater, Lehigh University, looked forward to striking out on her own. The last few years, while Kristen's older brother has been away at college, her parents have been able to focus their everyday attention on Kristen. She has mainly welcomed their involvement, but saw getting away as a chance to not just be a daughter, sister or student council president, but to be a wholly separate person.

Amy appreciated her parents too, but anticipated enjoying space away from them as well. "At home if I'm in a bad mood, they say, 'Why are you sad?' and I talk a lot so they get it out of me. But I don't always want to hear four opinions about my life. In college,

they won't know what's going on," said Amy, who was chosen Biggest Blabber in her class.

A few weeks before leaving for Stanford, a boy was visiting Kathy. It got late and she wanted to play some tapes for him without disturbing anyone else, so she took him to her bedroom and locked the door. Even though nothing untoward was going on, her father pounded on the door, found them and went ballistic, according to Kathy. "I felt hurt," she said. "He should have trusted me."

Wish Six: The New, Improved Me

Part of the separation from community and family, people who have known you for a long time, can be the chance to develop different parts of your personality.

For years, Michael Metzger was that tentative skinny little kid with glasses who knew all the answers and exchanged private jokes with the math teacher. In twelfth grade, he still joked with the teacher but got contact lenses, grew about a foot and soared in assurance.

"I was always confident about myself academically, but not athletically," recalled the long lean senior with floppy blond hair and soft brown eyes. Then he started running, and by senior year, he co-captained the division-winning cross country team and had close friends on it.

Still, friends have been hard won, and Michael felt misunderstanding, fear and jealousy separate the brains from others in suburban high schools where good is good, but too good is suspect. A fine line exists between the super smart and those who have 3.5 GPAs, do sports and party on weekends.

This division blurs at a place like MIT, Michael predicted, where everyone is a brain. As for new friends, he wanted "to have a group, but I don't want to bend myself to find one." He hoped to take most of his high school personality with him "except the bit about being uncomfortable in social situations."

As for a new academic bent, Michael anticipated majoring in engineering or physics. "[But] maybe I'll go completely wild and do English or philosophy," he said, adding the best part will be "doing the hard work, to see if I have a breaking point."

Like Michael, Kathy hoped to become more than just a smart kid at college. Contrary to her sensible image, she wanted to take some risks. After years of trying to get along with and please everybody, she was ready to say and do what she wants.

Of the five high-powered schools that admitted her—Brown, Tufts, Amherst, Vassar and Stanford—she chose Stanford because it was only one with strict requirements. "Any of the others would have been the easy way," she said. "For the first time I'm taking a risk. ... Instead of letting things happen to me, I want to make things happen. I've settled for second best in the past. I've been too willing to say, 'Fine, forget it,' instead of pushing for what I really want."

In high school, Kathy was the power-behind-the-throne, work-horse type. But she is fed up with that unassertive, old reliable image. "People view me as calm and smart," she said, "and that's all they see sometimes. There's more to me than that. People see this shy, competent person, who if you ask her to do something probably will. There's a multisided person underneath all that."

The minute she hit campus, Kathy hoped to make her presence felt. "I can see myself showing up and waiting for someone to talk to me. That's my high school self. My college self wants to go up to someone and say, 'Hi, did you just get here, too?'"

Unlike Kathy, Anne Prendergast, headed for College of the Holy Cross in Worcester, MA, expressed herself strongly in high school. On the other hand, many of her classmates may have been put off by her positions in favor of community service and organized religion and against teenage drinking. The "having good, clean fun" caption under a picture of her at a car wash fund-raiser may be slightly mocking.

"Other people in high school think I stay home all the time, that I would never go to a party, that I would never disobey my parents or stay out too late, the whole kind of goody-two-shoes image," acknowledged Anne with a grin. Yet she loves to go dancing at clubs, not always with parental permission. At Holy Cross, she hoped to be understood as a fun-loving person who just doesn't drink.

In general loosening up, Amy thought she might have the farthest to go. Amy looked laid-back in her short denim overalls and

two sleeveless contrasting T-shirts. Cascading brown curls framed her scrubbed face. But casual is hard work for Amy.

"I'm the kind of person who really has to try to make things work out," she explained. "I plan everything completely. I call ahead. I make arrangements." Indeed, weeks before school she was surrounded by her organized trunk and boxes, green and white UVM-colored quilt, matching sheets and hot pot. Amy had already had lunch with her dean, signed up for a checking account and made friends with her roommate.

But at the last minute, Amy's orchestrated calm crashed. Her roommate was unable to attend this semester. That left Amy in a double alone or with an unknown roommate.

"I did everything you have to do to make things work out and they didn't. So I've decided to have a new attitude. I'm going to save myself the high blood pressure and just let things happen."

After a week away, Amy guessed, "Either I'll be right back to my old uptight self and concerned about everything or I'm going to be totally a wild woman."

Wish Seven: Friends

Friends were a touchy but paramount topic. Everyone wanted others to like them, especially for their real, possibly new, selves. But nobody wanted to have sex, drink, join a Greek organization or espouse particular political beliefs to win friends.

Students with few high school friends, hoped to find more. Others, like Amy, had some friends they found superficial or untrustworthy. These students wanted better, truer alliances at college. Generally, students believed college provided lifelong friendships, and they looked forward to that.

On the other hand, a few, like Gretchen and Anne, felt less pressure because they were not looking for best friends. "I'm used to being with my four friends," said Anne. "I'm never going to lose touch with them. I was lucky to find my lifetime friends in high school. It may make it harder for me in college because people are going thinking they're about to find their best friends in the world. I've already found mine."

Kathy always had a best friend and wanted to be close with her roommates. "I hope we won't be just passing through each others' lives," she said.

After one week, Kristen predicted, "I'll be tired and excited, and I'll probably have found my closest friends."

Romantic friends were also a concern. Students who had never before been in a serious relationship hoped campus was the place to find one. Mac loved girls and dating, although the latter is not popular in his suburb, and hoped to find romance at Emory. He suspected his intensity may have scared off some girls in the past and planned to be more laid-back at college.

Others, like Peter, were influenced by parents who had met on campus. Most students said they weren't going to college to find mates, but felt open to the possibilities. However, Anne's last words were, "My biggest surprise would be becoming really committed to someone the first year."

A whole other batch of students left for college with previous romantic entanglements. Some left high school loves behind; others parted to different colleges. About half thought they could maintain their current love interests; the other half felt their passions would dissipate, but they weren't sure how. Josh and Tim were among the latter.

Worry One: No Friends

Every wish of departing college students had a worry coda. For example, as much as they hoped to find new and better friends, they feared they wouldn't. The nightmare of arriving on campus with the wrong clothes, the wrong parents, the wrong everything, and having no one to talk to was common.

More rationally, students, who had had the same friends forever, worried that their friend-making skills were rusty. Amy feared new people might misunderstand her moodiness and panicky reactions. Anne thought she should tone down her forcefulness to not scare off potential friends. Both felt being around people who hadn't known them for years would require some effort.

Worry Two: Rotten Roommates

Roommate rumors abound. The self-centered jerk, the impossible nerd, the control freak, the bad music-blasting, nonstudying pig were all threats to departing students. Everyone had heard stories of roommates whose lovers moved in for the semester or, more seriously, psychopaths who physically endangered roommates.

In addition, students said they welcomed diversity but feared actually living with it. Race, ethnic, sexual and economic differences were scary. Parents reinforced these fears by reacting to photos and letters from roommates. A student from a Dallas suburb was furious when her mom objected to her African-American roommate, but confessed she was secretly nervous as well. In the reverse situation, minority students were equally uneasy. By far the biggest concern was straight students who feared gay roommates' advances. Students' anxiety mostly resulted from ignorance and inexperience, not conscious bigotry.

But, especially for suburban kids who had never shared a bedroom, coexisting with any stranger in a small space for nine months seemed like a caged eternity.

Worry Three: Privacy Lost

Closely connected to roommate worries was the sense of lost privacy.

"I don't mind making mistakes, but I like to make them when nobody's looking," Michael admitted. "I am very used to, when I get tired of the world, going up to my room, shutting the door and shutting out everything for many hours. I don't think I'm going to able to do that at college. I also don't share the intimate parts of my life too much at all."

Gretchen valued time with her friends, but "reaches limits in group activities," noted her mom. Gretchen enjoyed spending hours alone in her bedroom, surrounded by her dried flowers, homemade quilt, cat named Homer and rap tapes. This desire for privacy may explain why she ended a brief romance with Mac and why living with three roommates may be especially trying.

"I'm going to miss coming home and being a little short-tempered and bossy," said Kathy. "I know my family can absorb my outbursts. If I showed that side at school, I might upset my image."

Worry Four: Cluelessness

As cool as some suburban students appear, many suspect that their urban peers are far more sophisticated than they. Headlines heralding widespread teenage violence, drug and alcohol abuse and sexual activity reach the suburbs. But they make some young residents feel cloistered from the real world. Out on rough and tumble campuses—which is the way even the most serene campuses may seem—they wonder what will be expected of them and how they will cope.

Along with larger experiences, students worried that they had missed smaller activities such as going to night clubs, tipping and, in one case, just taking cabs.

Worry Five: Too Much Freedom

Suburban students kicked and yelled against parental restrictions, but also relied on them to escape uncomfortable situations. Knowing a parent waited up for you could be an effective retreat from unwanted sex, alcohol or drugs. Removing the "my dad would kill me" excuse forced students to decide how they wanted to behave and to speak for themselves.

Deciding when and how much to study also worried students who had been closely monitored at home. Peter's parents warned him that his last minute approach to assignments wouldn't work in college, and he fretted that maybe they were right. Kristen said she would miss her tightly scheduled life of school, sports, study. "I'm not really a bad procrastinator, but I procrastinate enough that I could get into trouble."

Most students were fairly confident of their academic backgrounds. But, on their own, without the extras of a parent checking over a paper or buying the Cliffs Notes, they worried they might not do as well.

They also knew college has fewer class hours and more unscheduled time. Balancing work and fun worried students, espe-

cially those who felt suburbs offered no attractive distractions from school work.

Some students like Mac had done well in high school without working hard. "I was a sluggard," he admitted, but intended to change at Emory. The challenge was, could he?

Finally, parents might be a pain, but they were useful for practical skills such as nutritional planning and car maintenance. Male and female students worried about the lure of all-pizza diets and the consequent weight gain. One Westchester County (NY) student was apprehensive about taking her car to Alfred University, far from her dad's mechanical expertise.

On the other hand, suburban students saw some freedoms evaporating. Like many, Tim left behind his car and the freedom to buzz around town, especially to a reservoir that provided the solitude that he sometimes craved.

Josh gave up more freedom than most, and following the Naval Academy's strict rules posed a problem. "Josh doesn't suffer fools gladly," his mom said.

He countered, "I don't think I'll have any trouble with taking orders. I think if someone is above me, they are superior to me and I should listen to them." But Josh hadn't had many superiors and was raised in a nonauthoritarian home.

Another crimp in his style was the Academy's no dating rule. "I'm a flirt," he said, mentioning that the girlfriend he has dated for a year will accompany him and his parents to the Academy.

Little things might hurt, too. "I'm going to miss putting down the top of my car, going down to the beach and playing some volleyball with my friends, just hanging out basically," he said. He can't even bring a radio with him. The only personal object allowed is a picture.

"Sometimes I get a little nervous," he said, quickly regaining his military composure, "But not really."

Even heading for less restrictive campuses, students regretted leaving childhood freedom, if only illusory, behind. Kathy remarked that's why confetti and beach balls floated through their graduation ceremony. "It was the last time to be a kid," she said. At college, everything counts, was the general feeling.

Worry Six: Homesickness

After a stressful senior year and perhaps a clash of authority with parents during the summer, students were more sick of home than anticipating homesickness. Still, there was a melancholy to the most ordinary events: last lawn mowing, last fight with younger sibling, last dinner home and, especially, last night out with high school buddies.

"I've been away from home on my own all of a week," said Kathy, before taking off across country. "Now we're talking until Christmas. This is kind of a crash course in independence."

Most students hadn't been away from home for more than three weeks, and Kristen and Michael had histories of homesickness when she was an exchange student in France for three weeks sophomore year and when he was camper at a gifted and talented program in middle school. College administrators said college has a greater homesickness potential than foreign travel and camp because it's longer and represents a life passage.

PART

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Moving Out and In

CHAPTER

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The Trip

Odysseus set out for ancient Ithaca praying for adventures along the way. But today students launch their college journeys hoping for uneventful passages.

Yet, some are still heading for Ithaca. This time it's Ithaca, New York, home of Cornell. One woman on her way to that university described feeling young and old at the same time. "I was the baby of the family. I knew my mother was nervous about my leaving." And she was, too. "My parents drove me up. I was in the back seat surrounded by all my stuff, and I felt so shy, like a little kid with her toys. I felt like: Don't leave, Mom and Dad."

Later, "We drove in through the main campus. It was so big, and there were kids everywhere, swarms of orientation counselors in red shirts. I felt like I was going to summer camp, especially when we got to my dorm and the 'counselors' unloaded the car."

After her parents helped unpack and set up her room, she felt more secure. Then she was eager to get rid of her parents and start her official grownup life. But, at that point, her parents had planned to stay overnight, and they did.

Getting there was half the horror, according to a suburban New York student on his way to a Pennsylvania school. Judging from the cars crammed with telltale laundry baskets, desk lamps and hangers, he was sure that many others on the road shared his destination. Because he didn't want his private life observed through the windows, he urged his dad to drive fast. But much to his embarrassment, the station wagon broke down on the Tappan Zee

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Bridge. He was sure his future dormmates were whisking by and laughing at him.

Several students, especially oldest children, said their parents showed their discomfort by fighting, either with their kids or between themselves. "How could you wait till the last minute for this," "I can't believe how disorganized you are," "If this is the way you pack, how will you ever handle college work," were frequently cited carps.

Peter sensed the tension of the drive to Wisconsin even before starting. "On the morning we were leaving, I saw my Rollerblades, and said: Hey, I should put them in the car. But it was kind of full, and I had a couple of more bags to put in. My dad was really bitching about it, saying I don't believe you have more. So I didn't take them because I knew he was going to yell. That was a mistake." His mom sent them later.

Peter and others reported that usually compatible parents fought over things like directions, the time to leave and motel reservations. "They were just pathetic things," added Peter. Some students described long silent drives, punctuated only by "Did you remember?" One student commented, "They're nervous and you're nervous. It's not a good combination."

Josh and his family were spared some packing traumas because the Navy provides almost anything allowed at the Academy. Still, Josh couldn't avoid some last minute tension.

The Jacobsons and Josh's girlfriend drove to Maryland the night before because he was due to report early the next morning. At 5:30 a.m. Josh and his dad left the motel and stopped at a McDonald's for the last breakfast. Waiting in front of the restaurant a few minutes before it opened were parents with sons who looked a lot like Josh, tall, skinny and clean-cut. He guessed they were preplebes, too.

"Josh ran over to introduce himself. That's so unlike him. I think he was practicing for later in the day," Jeff Jacobson recalled. "Then he came back and said, 'Dad, I'm a little shaky.' "

What Gretchen needed on arrival at Wesleyan was a parking space. "The trip to school was really short, only an hour, so it wasn't too awful. My mom and sister came, and the car was absolutely

packed with my bike and everything. My theory was it's better to take everything than regret leaving anything behind. We drove up and saw people were registering in the Science Center. But we couldn't find a spot to park and drove around forever. Finally I got out, and they continued to look for a parking place. After a long wait in the registration line, I got to the front and discovered I needed my driver's license to register. I had left it in the car, which was now parked a mile away. I had to walk all the way and back. It was a little bit of an ordeal."

Mac coveted Gretchen's short jaunt. He recalled the process of farewells to friends, packing and traveling to Atlanta as long and unreal. "The trip lasted over two days. We stopped at my sister's house in Chapel Hill, and then she came along with us. I was very, very anxious to move in the whole way. I couldn't wait to finally liberate myself," he said. "It was a relief to see the campus; not like it might have completely disappeared or that getting in was a complete hoax." But when you go to a school that's far from home and when college acceptance has been such an overwhelming goal, those fears do exist on a certain level.

Another long-distance student, Kathy on her way to Stanford in Palo Alto, CA, worried about the difference between reality and fantasy. All summer she had a recurring dream of arriving in her former home town near Stanford, and "All the people I knew don't recognize me. Everything looks different there. All my teachers are old and senile. I feel that some part of me wants to go back and find everything the same. But another part of me knows it won't be, and I guess I don't really like that."

So what actually happened? "The night before I left I was pretty nervous. I did a lot of last minute packing and tried to go to bed early because we had to leave so early in the morning. My last view was in the dark and fog. I remember thinking that this was the last time I was going to see so much moisture and so many trees. It wasn't sad, but I knew it was going to be different."

Kathy, an African-American from an almost entirely white suburb going to a more diverse campus, may have anticipated more than a landscape change.

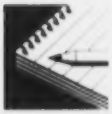
Accompanied by her mom, Kathy's campus arrival was gradual and like a vacation. They landed in San Francisco and went shop-

ping. Then they stayed near their former home in San Jose and visited Kathy's old elementary school. "One teacher had died the night before, and it wasn't the happiest occasion to arrive for. It was very much like my dream in that lots of things had changed. But it was better than my dream in some ways. In my dream I saw lots of people I knew who didn't recognize me and I felt out of touch. But in real life the only person I ran into did remember me—my kindergarten teacher."

A few days later on campus, Kathy got another pleasant surprise. "In front of my dorm, Branner Hall, a huge 7-foot banner spelled out the name. RAs (resident assistants) sat at a table under the banner welcoming us. As we arrived, they shouted out our names, like, 'Kathy, come on down!' They had memorized them from the pictures we sent in. It was neat that everybody knew your name."

Just as campuses are spruced up for incoming students, the students gave some thought to their appearances, too. Not too fancy and not too grungy was the general aim. As Kathy explained, "I knew I'd be moving in and lugging boxes around. If I came all decked out I was going to look like a big old snob. Forget that. I also wanted something that might be a conversation piece. So I decided on a Barcelona Olympics T-shirt and shorts."

A student from suburban Virginia arrived at Emory with the ultimate conversation piece, a NAKED T-shirt. The shirt was the title of his high school's literary magazine, and he met every person on campus because of it, he claimed.



TRIP TIPS

1. If students and parents have any style differences—e.g. morning v. night people, organized packer v. pile-it-all-in type, one who sets out early for every appointment v. last-minute-leaver—they will be magnified on the trip to college. Each side can ease the situation by discussing the differences and trying to compromise. For example, a family in which a student wants to arrive at her dorm before most other students but whose parents have a hard time getting going in the morning might leave for college the night before.

2. Students may experience complex and conflicting emotions such as feeling old and young, excited and numb, satisfied and anxious, confident and scared. Even if a student has always dreamed of going to college, he or she may be uncertain on departure day.

3. Parents may experience the same melange of feelings. They may be eager for students to set off on their own but also reluctant to let go. If students and parents accept their mixed emotions and recognize they are both going through a transition, the trip doesn't have to be so tense. Give each other a break and don't take out conflicts on the other.

4. Maintain a flexible farewell plan. Some students who had wanted their parents to drop them off quickly and then disappear and some who had intended that their parents hang around to help set up, changed their minds after arriving. Ideally, parents should be able to leave students for awhile but be reachable by phone for last minute reassurance and errands.

5. Expect hitches such as missing papers, wrong directions, lost keys. Have a sense of humor about errors and keep them in perspective. Remember that getting into a dorm room can't be as significant as getting accepted to the college.

6. Your parents and belongings are no more embarrassing than anyone else's.

7. Don't worry about what to wear, except that apparel should be comfortable for lugging unwieldy objects up and down stairs. Everybody else will be too self-conscious to notice. But a conversation piece, such as a message T-shirt, can be a terrific ice breaker.

CHAPTER

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You Have Arrived

Going to college, that's all you think about all summer. But actually being there is something else. After the storm clouds of packing and travel have cleared, here's what some students found.

Country Mouse Goes to Town

On Tim's street at home, deer, dogs and mail delivery are the main daytime stirrings. But on a brilliantly sunny day in late August his Emerson College Beacon Street block pulses with activity. Two young women in tiny shorts and enormous knee pads Rollerblade past the Julia Ward Howe house, an historic landmark. Teenagers in T-shirts declaring their loyalty to high school senior musicals and rock bands sashay by a Scientology Church bulletin board reading: Your IQ, personality and attitude alone determine your future. KNOW THEM. Farther down the block, palm reading, free HIV testing and auditions are touted. "Touch the sky" blasts out of an open window. Nobody on the block is over 30.

"When we drove down Beacon [St.] and around the Charlesgate, not even knowing that was my dorm, I was sort of uh oh. That was the first time I thought maybe I should have visited. I was like, oh man, this is just a street corner not a campus. I know it's what I wanted in my head, but ... this is where I'm going to be!" he exclaimed.

Tim moved from a suburban raised ranch to an eight-story former hotel with Romanesque mosaics in the lobby and elaborate cornices. The view from his small triple: a landmark Citgo sign, the

Charles River, the street scene, the Mass Ave. bridge leading to MIT and, if he craned his neck a bit, of Fenway Park—nirvana for a kid who craved city life, at least abstractly.

Second of the three roommates to arrive, Tim settled on a lower bunk, hung his Jane's Addiction poster, and noticed that the first roommate had claimed the biggest closet and spread out his expensive stereo equipment. Bad signs.

An awkward part about the beginning, Tim recalled, was having parents there, especially if they are separated or divorced. College is supposed to be your place and you're in charge, but you can't take charge because you don't know it well enough yet, students said. "I was embarrassed for me and for them," noted another frosh. "I had never seen my mother not know exactly what to do. I mean, we didn't even know where to have lunch."

Heavy Metal Roommate

Starting late, Anne and her family piled into their station wagon and sped along the Mass Pike until they arrived at the exit for Holy Cross. Traffic backed up from the school gates to the ramp. On the left, she could see Worcester's decaying inner city. On the right, the prospering college sat on a green hill.

The Prendergasts inched along with all the other student-stuffed cars and finally arrived at Anne's dorm. Students descended on the car and carried Anne's stuff to her room. "They were all so friendly and like family," she recalled. "I unpacked. My parents helped and, naturally, my little brothers got in the way."

"Then my roommate arrived. She was very pretty, very outgoing and very athletic looking. I was worried right away. I figured I better help bring up her stuff. I go down to her car and start to open a door and she yells, 'Watch out for my discus!' She takes out the discus with one hand and lifts off her bike with the other. I was a little intimidated and not too happy."

"So we go upstairs and the first thing she asks if I want to bunk the beds. I didn't. I decided if I didn't say my piece then, there was going to be trouble forever. So I said no."

Early the next morning Anne's roommate asked about the beds again. Again, Anne refused. But a day later, she felt herself capitu-

lating. "They aren't bunked yet, but by the weekend they probably will be," she sighed.

Greetings, Geek

"It looked bigger than I remembered," Peter said, arriving at the mostly empty, 903-acre Wisconsin campus. "That was Sunday and only the ROTC people were here. There was a ceremony, and we were sworn into the Navy. Then I said good-bye to my parents and my mom was crying. My dad walked her out of the building and they just kept going."

So Peter's real life had begun, yet part of it seemed unreal. He stayed in a temporary dorm and ate all his meals at McDonald's. But by Wednesday he had moved into his official room, and he and an ROTC buddy were outside giving each other "high and tights," military haircuts, as the other frosh arrived. "It was kind of funny and kids knew right away who we were," laughed Peter's friend. "They're walking by and crying, 'No, don't do it!'"

Settling in early made Peter feel more experienced than the regular frosh and gave him the free time to help others. "That's how I met the guy across the hall. I helped him put up his loft. We're totally different. He's a vegetarian and against the military. But we really get along," he said.

His roommate was another story. "He was not what I expected," Peter reported. "He was very thin, not too tall and wore thick glasses. I guess kind of your typical dork image." Unlike most in-state students, the roommate had no posters, rug or furnishings, and Peter missed the homey quality of many other dorm rooms. "He's such a cheapskate he doesn't even want to pay to get a loft [a raised-platform bed that is popular in many dorms because it increases floor space] built. He's not the kind of guy you want to hang around with a lot." So Peter headed off with two other guys for Welcome Week activities.

The Natives are Crabby

Gretchen got to her four-person suite at Wesleyan first, but, in a way, that made things worse. She was rested and eager to make friends as two of her roommates straggled in after an exhausting,

three-day college-sponsored wilderness program. Then the third roommate, who had been traveling for several weeks before college, arrived. She looked tired and grumpy too.

Gretchen didn't have much time to worry about them because she had to dash off to soccer practice. Before leaving, "My mom made me unpack my sheets and blankets. She said it was her job to make sure my bed was made for the first night because she had done it for my older brother and sister. She left a note on my pillow that said, 'You're wonderful.' I posted it on my bulletin board." And others admired it too.

Unexpectedly, the note was their final farewell. They planned to meet at a welcoming reception later, but Gretchen didn't make it. Just as well, many students agree, because emotional good-byes can be traumatic or embarrassing. A student from Western Massachusetts reported that his dad hugged him and his two new roommates "like they were sons too."

On the other hand, a suburban New York student whose mother had informed him she planned to cry when they parted didn't have time because he rushed her out of his room. A few minutes later, he was unpacking and realized he had too many clothes. He grabbed a pile and raced out to the field where parents had parked. But they were gone, and he thought maybe if his mom had cried he wouldn't feel like it now.

A Dorm is Not a Home

A suburban Connecticut student felt confident about leaving home for Boston College. She had worked, traveled to Russia and had a sister already attending the same college. "I was prepared for the new world," she proclaimed. "Then I get there and see this awful dorm room and a bathroom with 15 stalls. It was worse than the building I lived in in Russia and that had no electricity. At least there I had a private shower."

She continued, "I was the only one moving things in. My roommate wasn't there yet. Everything was all stark and echoing. My room looked just like a jail cell. The only things there were two stack beds, a desk and two dressers. I remember thinking, This is going to be awful. I wasn't worried about leaving home. It was more, How am I going to make this room my home?"

By yourself, most students warn. A California student and her parents found themselves in the center of a crowded Princeton dorm furnishings store. Surrounded by a panoply of objects at the same time she was exposed to so many new people and experiences far from home, the student felt overwhelmed and couldn't chose what she wanted for her room. At one point her mom, who was eager to settle her daughter comfortably, urged her to buy a bookcase. The student refused. "Don't be a bitch," the mother said, loud enough that she earned the admiration of similarly stressed parents while her daughter drew sympathetic peer glances.

Who's in Charge Here?

A room of her own was exactly what Amy didn't want as a UVM frosh. But that's what she got, and, worse, she also had the impending threat of a roommate from hell moving in any minute.

Here's what happened: After debating about signing up for an all-frosh dorm at campus center, Amy had decided on the mixed class dorm farther from classes because the rooms were nicer and the atmosphere was calmer. At least she'd have her frosh roommate for companionship. But Amy's original roommate had a last minute operation and couldn't enter college on time. That left Amy alone in a double on a distant, mainly sophomore part of campus. Now the prospects of living by herself away from her classmates seemed daunting.

"Actually, going to the first activities alone wasn't too bad," she said. "No one else knew anyone either. I did kind of miss talking it over with someone after. But the housing people assured me someone was moving in soon. They asked for my preferences. I wasn't picky; all I asked for was a freshman nonsmoker. They gave me a name and a date she'd arrive. The day came, and nothing happened. I called the girl and she was clueless about moving. I told her to come over and check out the room. She did, but I didn't have a good feeling about her. After she left I asked someone on my floor about her, and he said, 'You definitely don't want her.'"

The next potential roommate arrived a few weeks later. "She's really strange and you could smell the smoke on her clothes. She was living at this dorm where all they do is sit around and watch movies. I'm really active and don't even have a TV. Then she starts

arguing with me, saying she should have room preference because she's a sophomore. And I'm like, it's not my fault you didn't get your first choice. But what could I say? I told her to let me know."

Three days elapsed and Amy didn't hear from her. Then the phone rang; the smoking, TV-watcher wanted to move in. Amy fudged and said some other girls had been interested and she'd have to get back to her. Meanwhile another girl who sounded nice had called, but Amy didn't have time to call her back before the undesirable one called again. Such anxiety called for a snack. When Amy returned from the food machine, her phone message light was flashing, and she guessed it was the residential coordinator calling to confirm the new unwanted roommate. Amy was angry that the coordinator had given her an inappropriate candidate.

Amy asked her RA to explain to the coordinator that she wasn't some kind of princess and was really allergic to smoke. That brought on the third candidate. "She comes over and says it's not for sure she's moving in, she's just looking at the room. But she seems really nice and is a nonsmoker. She was a sophomore whose roommate dropped out. What was nice about her was she said she didn't want to deny me a single. See, if no one took the room in two days, I could have it to myself until next semester. Well, I figured if she didn't take it, somebody worse might. So she moved in."

Only Ten Years Minus 12 Hours to Go

Josh's first 12 hours of Navy life were as perfect as the blue Annapolis sky that day. He and his dad were up at 5:15 a.m., left the motel, stopped at McDonald's for his last civilian meal and arrived at the Academy at the scheduled 6 a.m.

With military efficiency, all 1200 plebes reported at carefully staggered hours. "We showed up at a basketball arena that had been converted into an assembly line. Even though I was one of the first scheduled to get there, hundreds of others were lined up outside," Josh recalled.

No longer the best, brightest or even the tallest, Josh joined the line of similar kids, all with small duffels and proud parents taking pictures. A sense of accomplishment and historical significance warmed the crowd. As Josh's dad explained, "It was like being the parent of a rabbi or priest. These kids have a higher calling. They're

making a ten-year commitment to their country. They're dedicating themselves to something nobler than themselves."

Inside the arena, the transition from civilian to military went like clockwork. "They called each name and routed us through the maze of details—blood samples, head shaving, uniforms, form filling out. I went in a regular high school kid in a white T-shirt and came out completely shaved, little cap on my head, in uniform with 100 pounds of more uniforms over my shoulder. You throw your bag on one bus and get on another. You fill out more forms, and meet up with your bags. It all rolls along and it's a blur," Josh reported.

He carried his bag to his room. One roommate was already there and all three name plates were on the door. "We started to organize our stuff," Josh said. "Things were nice then. The upperclassmen in charge were polite and everything."

Meanwhile, family and friends gathered in the open court in front of the dorm for the induction ceremony. "At 6 p.m. we marched in and filed into our seats. Everything looked all white and lit up, and parents were all around," Josh said. "The admiral and second in command said a few words, but I have no idea what they said. Everybody was dozing off. Then we rose and took the oath to uphold the Constitution. I was kind of numb and not listening to the exact words. Then a couple of Navy planes flew over, which was cool. Finally, we could go and say good-bye to our families, but we had been told that we had to report back to our designated area by 6:30 p.m."

Families stood near banners with their last initials waiting for a final look, word and maybe hug. Everywhere was the feeling that these young people would never be the same again.

"The kids are all streaming out," said Josh's dad. "They look like they've been hit in the face with a shovel."

"I hear one say to his mother, 'This sucks,' " Josh's mom remembered. "Then Josh comes running over, absolutely beaming. He laughs and says, 'Hey, look at my goofy sneakers and clothes.' He's in his element."

"He's the only one smiling," added Josh's dad.

"I was in pretty good spirits," Josh agreed. "It all seemed like a big joke and I was excited." He was also in a hurry. "We had to meet in a spot in Bancroft Hall, which is one of the hardest places to get

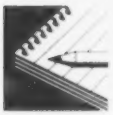
around if you're not familiar with it. It's a complete maze—miles and miles of corridors that look exactly alike. I was kind of iffy about how to get back there, so I left a few minutes early."

He leaped up the steps and flung open the doors. "It was like opening the gates of hell," Josh said. "Everyone was screaming and yelling and running and doing push ups. The screamers were the seniors doing plebe detail that summer. I run through trying to find my place. I get stopped about a half dozen times and yelled at. Finally I get where I'm supposed to be. I'm the only one there. Then another guy shows up. So we try to look like we know what we're doing, I talk to him through the side of my mouth. 'Is this where we're supposed to be?' 'I don't know,' he says. We decide it's a really, really bad idea to be standing there alone. I take off in the direction of my room. On the way, I stumble onto 30 classmates squeezed into a stairwell doing push ups."

That's where he stayed for three hours of torturous exercises. "At 10 p.m. we're all in bed with our eyes wide open, wondering, 'What did we do to ourselves?'"

The next two days were even harder, Josh said, because "you knew what was coming and had to keep saying, I've got to get back up; I've got to keep doing this."

"It was especially hard because most of us had slacked off the second semester senior year in high school. Realizing we had to go 17, 18 hours straight was tough. For example, by 10 a.m. we'd have been running around for five hours, and I was ready to call it quits. Everybody felt the same way, and we talked about it among ourselves. There wasn't too much machismo going on. Big football players were passing out on the field. Everyone's got a shaved head and is scared out of his mind."



ARRIVAL TIPS

1. You can read the character of your new home in its details—snatches of conversation, music floating from rooms, posters.
2. As you drive in, locate your dorm in relation to other main campus buildings, town, the highway.
3. Even if you arrive first in your room and opt for the best bed, desk and closet, you may have to negotiate for them later when your roommate arrives.
4. Don't let little problems throw you. Expect foul ups in details like checking accounts, dorm assignments, etc. Don't panic. Most mistakes can be corrected. Even awful roommates can be switched.
5. Suspend judgment about your roommates. Don't be too critical or enthusiastic.
6. Be prepared to find campus looks different from what you imagined or even what you remember from previous visits.
7. Expect a dizzying pace of activities—e.g. orientation sessions, class picture, team practices.
8. Try to stay loose and flexible. Accept that your best laid plans, like saying good-bye to your parents or setting up your room in a certain way, may go awry.
9. Be honest with your parents. If you don't want them to hang around and help set up, tell them, in a kindly way of course. But beware, you may change your mind. Tell your parents that too.
10. One thing that threw most first years was the coed bathroom. Many coed dorms have them or a combination of coed and single-sex bathrooms. As the year progressed, many students

used the facility closest to their rooms no matter what it was labeled. Sometimes in-coming frosh vote on how to designate the bathrooms. Some first years were embarrassed to vote for the single-sex variety and didn't discover that others agreed with them until weeks later. As in other first year issues, speak up for what you really want. Several students found more privacy in other restrooms on campus.

11. Take heart, all frosh are in this together. No matter how cool the others seem, they are going through exactly what you are.

12. Beware: in some ways, the arrival and first day are easy because so many activities are mandatory and fill up so much time. Sometimes students experience a letdown after this initial whirlwind.

CHAPTER

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You're Not in Weston Anymore

Like Dorothy in *The Wizard of Oz*, most first years experience a telling moment when they realize they are far from home and the familiar. Sometimes that moment is the smell of institutional food, the sound of strange voices on unaccustomed topics or just a glance at themselves in the mirror at a long row of dorm sinks. In any case, the ordinary experience makes college reality.

Usually the moment comes after the travel to school and the first flurry of unpacking, meeting roommates and leaving parents. Sometimes the moment is "Yes, this is exactly the way I thought it would be." Other times it is more "The viewbook sure never mentioned this." Most times it is in the middle, more like "I had heard about this, but didn't really believe it."

Here are students describing their moments.

Hot Sox

Amy looked forward to escaping the sameness of the people in her affluent suburb and the materialistic values of many of her friends. What drew her to UVM was the wholesome, unaffected students she had seen there. She also liked the appeal of a state school with a "crunchy"—natural, '90s kind of hippie—reputation.

"The first day of orientation this kid comes down to a dorm meeting. It was 95 degrees and he's drinking hot coffee and wear-

ing wool socks. He looked like things—who knows what—were growing in his hair. He's carrying chop sticks and eating these weird beans. He sits down next to me. 'Want a bean?' he asked."

Amy didn't, but she did have the liberating sensation of being away from conventional suburbanites and being open to new experiences.

Later, she struck out on her own in a more challenging way. "For registration you have to get up at 8 a.m. and go prepared. You have to know which courses you need, how many credits and how to work it out. Once you get there there are these long lines to sign up for courses, and it's every man for himself. You know you can't leave until you have it done, and done right.

"I had my schedule all planned. I stood in line for this American Lit. class. I was the fourth person up and I waited 20 minutes. I get to the front and the class is closed out. There was nothing to do but figure out something else and get back in that line. There was no parent or teacher to tell you what to do."

Amy's social expectations were more of a letdown. Most suburban students admitted their visions of college included instant popularity. After all, most were entering schools with larger pools of possible friends and were meeting people who didn't know their possibly nerdy pasts.

"I thought I'd come here and meet all these people and have all these friends," said Amy. "But it wasn't like that. The first couple weeks were very, very lonely, especially since I was in a single. I knew people, but not well enough to just plop down in their rooms. I wasn't prepared for it."

Amy was used to having a best friend, the kind you don't have to do anything special with but just hang out together. Of making new friends, she said, "You forget how to do it." The effort to make friends was new for many suburban students because they had had the same friends for so long. As one BC student noted, "I graduated with 15 kids I had known since I was two."

A Tufts frosh who had the same best friend since first grade agreed. "I was surprised how insecure I felt in the beginning and how long it took me to adjust," she said. "I wasn't used to explaining myself and expected friends to happen automatically."

Everybody Else is Perfect

Half the entering class at MIT thinks she or he got in by mistake, computer mistake probably, said an administrator. This feeling of being admitted under false pretenses and the chance of being discovered any minute is common in the beginning. Leah Smith, a former dean at Swarthmore College, called it "the impostor syndrome."

"It seems like everybody was a National Merit finalist or a salutatorian or valedictorian," said a student from a Westchester County (NY) suburb of his first day at Amherst. He himself had always been a top student, popular, handsome and a soccer star. The second morning on campus, he decided to cheer himself up by taking a run. "I thought, well, maybe I'm not as brilliant as some of them, but at least I'm athletic. So I put on my shorts and open the door of my dorm. Every kid I see is running or carrying a bag to go to the gym. I guess they're all smart jocks," he said. So much for his edge.

"The first day of class in high school you looked around the room and knew you could count on certain kids to drag down the curve. But here you know everyone can do the work," said a frosh at a highly selective college. "Even if they act stupid outside of class, they're smart."

The young woman crying in her bed at Holy Cross was a high school tennis champ and theater star. But her first week at college she tried out for the tennis team and didn't make it, and auditioned for a play part that she didn't get. "I think it hit her that she was in a place where nobody knew her talents and the kinds of things she would have gotten automatically at home," noted her hallmate.

Big Deal Recruits

Kristen expected to work hard academically and athletically at Lehigh just as she had in high school. During the summer, she contemplated not playing a sport the first year but decided since she had been recruited for soccer and because sports had always helped her focus her study time, she would go for it.

As an athlete, she arrived early on campus for practices and went to the first meeting. "You're sitting on the bench and everyone

is looking everyone else over. The coach comes out and says there are only so many spots on the traveling team and she can't guarantee anything. You're thinking, No problem, I was recruited. But the person next to you says she was recruited, too. And the one next to her. We were all recruited. In the spring we had all gotten order forms for the team jacket and we ordered it. So you think, Great, I've got this jacket and if I don't make the team I'm really going to feel dumb."

Kristen did make the team, but that moment made her realize how much more unpredictable college is than home and how first years have to prove themselves.

Life beyond recruitment also hit another student who had been recruited for football at a small western New York school. He was surprised that he wasn't the only one lined up for his position. Then after only a few practices, he was injured and never played a game. Football was the main reason he had chosen the school, and he hadn't imagined college without the sport. He was depressed and also embarrassed to mention his injury to home friends. In fact, he didn't.

As Princeton's lacrosse coach Bill Tierney says, "We always start every interview by asking, 'How would you feel if you didn't play?'" I can handle it, most recruits reply. But if it happens to them, many are crushed.

Home is Where the Shampoo is

"The second week we come back from practice," Kristen recalled, "and go to dinner. We finish and someone always says, 'Who's going home?' and means the dorm. That's when it hit me—this really was my home now. When I was packing to go home for Pacing Break (in October), it was horrible. I'm like I have everything here so what am I going to do at home? I don't have any shampoo or anything at home."

Real Talk

Even if you attend a sophisticated suburban high school and hang out with the smart kids, students report that intellectual and political conversations are limited. Social gossip, sports and status quo politics still rule. As one northern Virginia student said, "You

get good grades but don't get too many ideas. You vote like your parents." Some see college as a place to get intellectually involved and learn about opposing views.

"The whole intellectual experience is exactly the way I thought college would be," said Anne. She loved overhearing a heated argument about national politics in a stairwell in the library on one of the first days.

Learning was the way she had imagined also. "I'm an English major, but I don't know as much about it—especially poetry—as others in my class," Anne reported. "So I went downstairs in my dorm and found this guy in my class. We formed a little study group of five and sat in the hall, paraphrasing the poem and getting into some philosophical discussion. We were sitting around getting to know each other but talking about things too. It was just like I thought."

A combination of physical and intellectual things wows you, recalled a Smith student. "Like walking across the quad, people are talking here and there, the sunlight is slanting in a certain way, the buildings are all Gothic. And then you're in the library and all this information is at your fingertips," she said. "I remember my roommate had to look up articles on the production of Shakespeare's plays in the 1800's, and there were old magazines—a 1896 *Harper's*—right there."

The Smithie's moment of really-at-college arrived earlier. "I was walking into the bathroom and someone was walking out. It was late, but no one was thinking about the time. We paused in the entryway and started talking about something, an idea, but I don't remember what. Soon five people were standing in the bathroom doorway having this really deep discussion. Nothing else mattered. I was there till 2 a.m."

Odd Man Out

Peter is the kind of friendly, unpretentious guy everybody liked in high school. But on the second day at Wisconsin, he was labeled the enemy. "I was walking back to my dorm and I'm holding this folder that says ROTC at the top and has the school symbol, a badger. Two girls are walking the other way, and one says, 'Oh, great, another ROTC bum.' Later, I got my uniforms and was carrying the

jacket on a hanger. I got the nastiest look from a couple of guys passing by. I've even seen some people cross the street to avoid me when I have my uniform on."

Mac never considered himself part of the establishment. But as a white Anglo-Saxon Protestant he was certainly in the majority in his Connecticut suburb. Then the first week at Emory, "We're all crammed into this kid's room, and I look around and see I'm the only one who isn't Jewish," he recalled.

Another Eastern seaboard student took off for a big state school in the midwest. "I didn't think about the size that much until I realized that there were more people in my one dorm than in my whole high school."

And he was an outsider, too, surrounded by many in-state students who had gone to the same high school. "In a lot of ways, everyone knows everyone else and came with all their friends. It's not so bad for me, although I'm never going to understand those old high school stories."

Different States of Mind

Regional stereotypes are dangerous, but eastern suburban students found some truth to the assumptions about life beyond the Hudson River.

Kathy recalled one of her first days at Stanford: "I was crossing the street and cars actually slowed down to let me go, unlike downtown Westport (CT). There are also lots more smiles on people's faces."

But don't be misled by the apparent gentle slowness, warned a Duke student. "The people seem relaxed, easy to please and not so judgmental, so I was shocked how much (classroom) accountability there was."

A northern frosh at the University of Richmond noticed a difference right away. "It was the clothes," she reported. "Just going to class some women wore real get-ups, expensive womanly-type clothes, even dresses and suits. My roommate and her friends dressed up for class and wouldn't think of not wearing makeup." The scrubbed face young woman in jeans was put off by her roommate in the beginning. "She seemed so proper. But underneath it, she was the greatest person." That took time to discover.

YOU'RE NOT AT HOME ANYMORE TIPS

1. Coming face to face with diversity at college is different from thinking about it.
2. Don't immediately shut out people and ideas that appear different. For the fullest college experience, be open to differences.
3. Don't expect close friends instantly. Remember your friend-making skills may be dull from years of knowing the same people.
4. Everybody else may appear smart, athletic, good looking—in short, perfect. And they may be, but you got into the same school and are probably pretty perfect too.
5. Don't expect to take over your old high school positions. Editors, lead actors, starting pitchers are usually not frosh. Be willing to begin at the bottom because that's where you are. Sometimes the first-year clean up person makes it to upper level student government just by putting in time.
6. Soon you may start to refer to campus and your dorm as "home." This is not weird.
7. Expect that other students may talk about ideas and intellectual subjects. Be prepared to say what you think and back up your thoughts with information.
8. For the first time in your life, you may be the odd ball—the only one of a certain religion, the only one who hasn't smoked pot, the only out-of-stater. Starting out singular may be hard, but most colleges are large and diverse enough that you will find others like yourself. Feeling like a minority may also develop your empathy for others in similar situations.
9. Apparent differences such as regionalisms may be deceiving. Beware of stereotypes. You may not be the suburban student that others expect either.

PART

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First Firsts

CHAPTER

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Orientation: The Big Bang Theory

Caring and scaring is the sometimes double-edged nature of orientation.

"Mainly, we want to give the new students a sense of belonging," explained Jill Carnaghi, UVM Director of Residential Life. "But orientation is a valuable point to state our expectations before the older students arrive and disabuse them of what's cool."

Orientation—the official on campus period set aside for introduction to college life—has evolved from the library tour and freshman dance of students' parents to sessions on computer networks and date rape. It continues to change to meet the needs of society as reflected on campuses.

Four standard areas covered during many orientation programs are diagnostic testing to determine class placement in English, math and languages; nuts and bolts information sessions about courses, facilities and resources; discussions of what's politically and legally correct on campus; and touchy-feely activities designed to foster group ties and individual awareness. In addition, some schools include a common intellectual experience and/or community service.

Some schools like the universities of Wisconsin and Vermont offer two orientations—one during the summer for small groups of incoming students and another at the beginning of the academic year for the whole frosh class. Conscious of their financial and

emotional impact on the family, many colleges also hold separate sessions for parents.

"Some parents have a difficult time letting go of their children. We educate them about what happens to the students on campus, and that the students will be different when they see them at Thanksgiving," said Steve Avelleyra, UVM Director of Orientation.

Welcome Nerds

MIT's orientation, like its whole first year experience, is compared to trying to drink from a fire hose. New students arrive a week before classes begin for R/O, a combination Greek rush—choosing and being chosen for fraternities and sororities—and orientation. Unlike most schools that postpone rush until at least October, and an increasing number that delay the process until sophomore year, MIT plunges in because fraternity houses are a way to provide accommodations for an entering class of 1200. MIT's four sororities do not have separate housing yet.

Since orientation housing is temporary, in-coming students are allowed little baggage. As a result, many new MITers deliver themselves to the Institute while parents perform the farewell ritual a week later when they bring the big baggage. So Michael, who dreaded the loss of his privacy and the comfort of his books, arrived on campus for total academic and social immersion armed only with his dad's old Vietnam duffel.

During the first week, Michael shared a six-man suite of singles; endured a two-hour math exam and the Freshman Essay Evaluation, a two-hour essay exam; attended a seminar in language and politics taught by his recently assigned advisor; participated in a round of group activities called MOYA (Move Off Your Assumptions); signed up for a meal plan and checking account; got the lay of the land from the Plasma Fusion Center to the Ocean Engineering Testing Tank; and survived fraternity rush, although opting for a dorm and lottery-assigned roommate.

MIT's orientation stands out as particularly whirlwind and chockfull because the school is so academically high-powered, its resources so vast and the student stereotype is book smart but socially inept. But its extremes make it a useful example of the

transition jolts many suburban students experience during orientation.

Just the first glimpse of an urban campus like MIT can be intimidating. A student from a leafy Ohio suburb who had visited many pastoral campuses was chilled by the Institute's neoclassic architecture and large paved open spaces. Students, like Michael, coming from bucolic towns faced buildings familiarly referred to as #4 and #12 and lobbies dubbed #7 and #8. The most famous passage, lined with forbiddingly labeled doors such as High Temperature Corrosion and decorated with a Bessemer Process illustration, is called "The Infinite Corridor."

The corridor is plastered with flyers for groups and activities as varied as Life After Death, an Iron Maiden Concert; the Baptist Student Fellowship Lasagna Dinner; Israeli Dancing; the Korean Student Association; and LABIA, Lesbians and Bisexuals in Alliance. It's a far cry from the leaf pickup schedules and PTA bulletins posted in downtown Weston, but Michael, and other students, said they expected the change. What they didn't expect is the degree of change and that there are real people who populate the campus groups behind the announcements.

Campus diversity is apparent from the first orientation meeting. In Michael's class, 30 percent are Asian, 8 percent are from other countries, another 8 percent are Hispanic Americans, 5 percent are African Americans and 1 percent are Native Americans. In addition, 20 percent are Jewish. Obviously, the MIT family is much more polyglot than Weston's community. But, again, Michael and his peers are intellectually prepared for the difference. Still, becoming an instant minority can be unsettling.

Orientation can feel overwhelming, said many frosh. But the dizzying effect helped shift the attention from self to group and just plain "keeps you so busy you don't get homesick."

In fact, MIT's zoomy orientation endears the school to some frosh, who as members of a sometimes beleaguered minority—the really smart—handle their separateness with self-deprecating humor, and take pride in suffering. For example, the list of ten top reasons to choose a certain dorm included only seven items. Two campus tours were billed as Frolicking Through Fluid Mechanics and Leaks in the Nuclear Umbrella. A handout touting the advantages of taking a lower level Physics course (8.01L) included a for-

mer frosh's motivation, "Because I'm physics retarded." An independent living group lured new residents by promoting its "dorky looking fish pond." Another pushed no-brain activities, saying, "In the long run, learning to solve differential equations is probably less important than you and your friends teaching each other to juggle." Fraternities offered icebreakers like continuous showings of "The Simpsons" and Jell-O wrestling. Elsewhere, a room set aside for escape from rush, was stocked with Kool-Aid, Legos and Play-Doh.

Laughing at yourself is an important balm during an orientation that is also filled with tough sessions on sexual harassment, homophobia and campus safety.

In the end, Michael chose not to join a fraternity. Visiting the houses, "I didn't have the feeling: This is the one place for me. Also, if you join a fraternity, they have a share in you. That has its advantages and disadvantages."

As for rush, "It's too high pressure a method to decide where you want to live for four years and who your friends are going to be," he said. "Actually, I'm happy with the system because I got my first choice dorm and floor and was slotted in with a compatible roommate." Michael added that at MIT (as at many schools) rush isn't a now or never situation, and that it also takes place later in the year and in succeeding years, too.

MIT acknowledges the pressures of a three-day rush period during orientation. Margaret S. Enders, MIT's assistant dean for curricular support, said, "I find that for some R/O is a piece of cake. Others are so shy that it forces them to make friends that they might not make for a long time. Whenever it takes place, rush is always a forced situation."

Travis Merritt, literature professor and associate dean for undergraduate academics called R/O a "royal frenzy," and said, "I would prefer rush at some other time because I don't like the other activities eclipsed by it. But the advantages are that students love it, and, if you moved it back, the result might be more homogeneous groups. Now the happy result is that students have the illusion of finding each other."

A happy orientation event for Michael was MIT President Charles M. Vest's welcoming speech. "He started by saying, 'Welcome Nerds,'" Michael laughed.

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Vest, who also threw himself into a crowd of students in Free Fall, an exercise in trust, explained, "On the banks of the Charles it is okay to be a nerd," adding that unlike the high school slur, "It is a good-natured reminder that MIT strongly respects focused intellectual achievement, inventiveness, and dedication, even as it opens to you ever broader worlds and opportunities."

Not Camp Wesleyan

If MIT's orientation is based on the needs of reticent nerds, then Wesleyan's is geared for talking heads.

Wesleyan students are reputed to be smart, verbal, independent, liberal activists. In fact, they are very bright. The 707 students of the Class of '96 arrived on campus with an aggregate SAT score of 890,820, as Dean for Admissions and Financial Aid Barbara-Jan Wilson humorously noted in her welcome.

But, although known as the kids who debated their high school teachers, the entering class's math scores are higher than their verbal scores, and 42 percent intend to major in traditional math or natural sciences.

Despite Wesleyan's raffish image, "This is definitely a preppy school," said a first year from suburban Chicago, who after traveling through Europe and working in Israel expected a more underdog mentality. The high school with the largest representation in Gretchen's class was the establishment Phillips Exeter Academy. Delegations from other private schools—Fieldston, Hunter and Andover—were not far behind.

Yet, some of the reputation is true. Liberal organizations far outnumber conservative groups. During a Presidential election year, Republicans are hard to find. And the traditional campus force, Greek life, has been mostly transformed into coed clubs. Still, activism remains elusive. "I think that idea is left over from the 70's," observed Gretchen, who, like many here, wanted to be in a liberal atmosphere but didn't want to foment rebellion.

Independence also does characterize the frosh, of whom more than half choose single room housing, and orientation provides for their autonomy. "Students chose Wesleyan because there is no core curriculum, but we do have requirements and those are explained during orientation. They come here because they don't want to be

told what to do, but they do want guidance," Dean for First Year Students Meg Zocco described the program's precarious balance between help and hands-off.

The difficulty of presenting information and group rules to a bunch of independents is tough. "Students believe they have been exposed to diversity before they arrive, but they really haven't lived with it. Even those who have traveled are thrown for a loop," Zocco noted of a class that is 32% minority students. Wesleyan's Diversity University identity has become such a cliché that many incoming students mouth the accepting slogans without considering the reality.

So along with placement tests, campus tours, academic advising, barbecues, untalent shows, ice cream eating contests and square dancing, the university offers Living and Learning at Wesleyan to bring reality home. Part of L&L is a skit presentation about individual responsibilities and community standards. Alcohol and drug abuse, judicial procedures, the honor system, student government and security are covered.

For students who may be accustomed to casual or highly individualized policies on right and wrong, the university's position is startling.

L&L part two is called "Appreciating Our Differences," a series of prejudice reduction activities. Gretchen attended a morning workshop led by a recent Wesleyan grad who wears a T-shirt with a pink triangle, the sign Nazis forced homosexuals to wear and that is now proudly exhibited by some gays.

During the workshop students identify groups they belong to and describe discrimination they may have experienced because of these groups. New students, who consider themselves unprejudiced, discover their own stereotypes and begin to realize their open-mindedness is mainly untested. For example, one young woman stated that she supported gay rights but had never known anybody gay and didn't know what the leader's T-shirt symbolized.

"At Wesleyan we are all of good will," the leader said. "But we have to go a step further to confront our own awkward feelings about racism, sexism and homophobia. We can gain from realizing we all have a lot to learn."

That afternoon Gretchen attended a larger lecture hall presentation about gender relations. The presentation's facilitators were

a young woman who experienced date rape as a first year at University of New Hampshire and a 1988 Wesleyan grad who had been surprised to find himself in a sexual relationship after two days on campus. They portrayed a young man and woman who meet at a college party, misread each others' sexual cues, resulting in his raping her.

The students listened to frank dialog that included:

> She: I was startled when he started to go beyond kissing. I tried to say stop, then I cried, and finally I froze.
>
> He: If she didn't want to have sex why did she come to my room? The way she dressed showed she wasn't a virgin.

The audience was polite but uninvolved until a facilitator said one in four college women experience rape or attempted rape, and 70-80 percent of reported rapes are date rapes. The other facilitator added, "Rape is a crime of violence not of sex."

The audience seemed doubting.

"If you take a frying pan and whack someone over the head as hard as you can, do we call that cooking?" a facilitator asked.

Then a movie about campus rape narrated by "LA Law" duo Susan Dey and Corbin Bernsen was shown. At first the audience sneered, but gradually it was caught up by the true stories.

> "It happened at a small, private, coed school," one young woman begins. "I had just left an overprotective family," she continued.
>
> "I thought it was my fault," said another.
>
> "I didn't tell anyone, and began hating myself more and more," explained another.

The messages were: Beware of strangers, keep your doors locked, don't walk alone in dark places. Drinking and drugs are risky. Trust your instincts, and when you feel threatened, get away. Communicate clearly what if any sex you want. When young women say no, they mean no.

After the movie, a small brunette raised her hand. She gave her first name and said, "I was sexually harassed at work. Physically, I wasn't hurt but emotionally I was. For a long time, I thought I was a bad person. Finally, I realized, they're the ones with the problem, not me."

The session ended and the feeling was: sexual abuse doesn't just happen to them; it happens to us. Gretchen signed up for the Wesleyan Coalition Concerning Sexual Abuse.

At the same time that students are encountering social and personal revelations, the university is asserting its academic identity. Wesleyan, like many other schools, assigns summer reading to new students. But, unlike many others, the reading focuses on a single issue. Gretchen's year the issue was "The Debate Over *JFK*," and concerned the Oliver Stone film that portrays Kennedy's assassination as a government conspiracy. All frosh viewed the film, attended lectures and participated in discussions during orientation.

The idea is to superimpose a common intellectual framework over new students' personal adjustments. But more than that, Wesleyan, which allows students to design their own majors, aims at introducing the idea of interdisciplinary study, fostering a critical approach to popular culture and establishing the school's questioning environment.

Dean Zocco explained, "In the last several years we have shifted to a purposeful academic focus. After all, this is an academic institution, not Camp Wesleyan."

As an example of the multifaceted approach to a subject, here are the titles of a few discussion groups: "The Paranoid Style in Life and Art," "Lee Harvey Oswald Alone Shot the President," "Is There Acoustic Evidence for a Second Assassin of JFK?" and "The City that Hates: Dallas, JFK and the Politics of Conspiracy."

So many theories, all from respected authorities, and some truth in each one is a new experience for many suburban students who were in part admitted to good schools like Wesleyan because they circled the right answers on multiple choice exams.

Gretchen and other suburban students were impressed that classroom debate flowed over into private conversations. "We were encouraged to bring the discussion back to our dorms, and it actually happened," she said in surprise.

If You Build an Orientation, Will They Come?

Although most suburban students found some value and fun in their various orientations, all the home-to-college transition programs face problems of nonattendance.

The University of Wisconsin at Madison has the awesome task of integrating 4,300 frosh into a school of 30,000 students. The university's Center for New Student Development handles the job by dividing orientation into two sections. One, held in staggered sessions during the summer, is called SOAR (Summer Orientation and Registration) and the other, at the beginning of the fall semester, is called Welcome Week.

"We try to deliver the harsh truths of college life without scaring the kids," explained Maggie Balertriesi, project assistant at the Center. "Academically, we say, you think it's going to be hard and it's going to be harder than you think."

Acknowledging orientation's inherent conflicts of support and warning, Balertriesi added, "We're bombarding kids with issues like diversity and rape while they're worried about having friends and finding the library."

A student agreed. "During SOAR we had these big lectures, and I felt slammed in the face about things like date rape and discrimination. I'm from a fairly conservative town, but I'm open to ideas. I came to orientation for information about courses and dorms. But they're telling me how to live and think, and what my values should be. Even if I agreed with some of it, that wasn't why I came here."

Orientation organizers understand this reaction, but stress that new students must know from the start which behaviors are and are not tolerated in large diverse communities.

Even less didactic programs receive complaints. Along with the usual dances, comedy nights and water sports, Wisconsin offers social activities designed to break down barriers and help students make friends. They are denoted by a mask logo in the orientation brochure because they "get beyond the masks." But some students want to maintain their facades.

"I wasn't afraid to act silly during orientation," Peter said. "But a few kids didn't want to. The leaders asked us to get up in groups according to our birthdays and make the appropriate animal sounds. May, my month, was a cow. You were supposed to walk around mooing. Some girls just stood there with their arms crossed, saying, 'This is so immature.' I mean, who cares, it's just for fun."

As another part of orientation, Wisconsin provides SOS (Students Orienting Students), a mentoring program that assigns a

junior or senior to a small group of frosh. To evaluate orientation, SOS contacted 994 of the new students and found approximately 700 had attended some Welcome Week activities.

Of those activities, the students rated most helpful the traditional convocation introducing the administration and faculty and including a demonstration by a chemistry professor. On the other hand, they rated least helpful a professional theater production about AIDS awareness and safe sex. Students' most frequent suggestion was for more campus/library tours while the rarest request was for more dances.

Every orientation was less effective than its planners had hoped. Bad weather put a damper on picnics. Sports practices conflicted with activities or athletes—who sometimes had three workouts a day—were so exhausted they slept during any orientation exercise that dimmed the lights, like movies and slide shows. Professional actors hired to perform skits or lead audience-participation routines bombed on some campuses while they succeeded at others.

But mainly, attending orientation activities was deemed less fashionable than sleeping or just hanging out for some frosh trying to maintain a sophisticated veneer. As one exasperated administrator huffed, "You could say you were giving the answers to midterms and they wouldn't show up."

"Yes, I would," countered Mac, but some activities alienated him. "We had these mixers with girls from other halls, which were simply food or paint fights. Perhaps if I were 12-years-old, I might have enjoyed them. No, I take it back, at 12 I had better things to do."

On the other hand, part of orientation was scary. "As much of an extrovert as I am, I got intimidated by these incredibly large masses of people. There's nothing more humbling than looking into a group of 1200 kids and knowing only one or two," Mac observed.

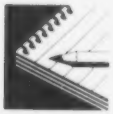
Emory is aware of feelings like Mac's, said Director of Student Development Cynthia A. Shaw, and has designed a seminar program that begins during orientation and lasts through the first semester. The small group sessions are designed to create a sense of community and provide a combination of academic and social activities. Mac's year, the seminar added a community service project. Each seminar was to volunteer services one Saturday in the fall.

The mandatory and artificial nature of the project bothered Mac. However, once he got into cleaning up the outside of a home for the elderly, he felt better about it.

In general, Mac favored a less manipulated orientation. He stopped going to most activities, and said, "I wish they had just left us alone more. You can find your own friends."

Yet, he had a few problems on his own. Spotting a likely girlfriend during orientation, he talked with her for hours at breakfast and called her a few times. Then he told her it was her turn to call him, but she didn't. "I see her on campus and say 'hi,' but she never showed any more interest. That was an early letdown."

Sometimes an orientation's failure has positive results. As Tim noted, "The meeting people activities were very summer campish. There were these orientation leaders running around like camp counselors in blue shirts that said 'A Field of Possibilities,' but the possibilities didn't seem that great. One thing was, you kind of made friends with other kids who weren't joining in either."



ORIENTATION TIPS

1. Orientation is the transition period between the frosh arrival on campus and the beginning of the regular academic year. Most colleges use the time to introduce their philosophies, staff and facilities. Some schools offer programs for parents as well as students.

2. In addition, lots of nitty-gritty business is accomplished. Expect diagnostic testing to determine placement in some classes, especially foreign language and math. Usually students who have taken high level high school courses are not exempt from this testing so get out your no. 2 pencils. Final arrangements are made in housing, meal plans and class registration as well.

3. Since many students are plunging into larger, more diverse communities than they left, colleges present the rules and benefits of the new communities. Most colleges offer presentations and workshops on sexual harassment, homophobia, racial discrimination, drug and alcohol abuse and campus safety. Expect some in-your-face activities that may challenge your assumptions.

4. Don't despair, orientation is fun too. Most colleges offer socials, sports, entertainment and the best food of the year.

5. Orientation is prime time for making friends. Everybody is new, most don't know many other people and everybody is looking for friends. Students suggested capitalizing on the situation and on first-week energy to meet as many people as possible.

6. Bonding events in which students do serious and/or silly activities that make them feel close to each other are another orientation basic.

7. Even the best orientation events fail if students don't attend them. In general, students who enjoyed frosh year most took full advantage of mandatory and optional orientation activities. Many students who skipped out regretted it later. This is no time to pretend you know it all; you don't. At worst, if you hate some events, you'll meet kindred spirits.

8. Don't be surprised if you feel in constant motion. Colleges know keeping new students busy prevents homesickness.

CHAPTER

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Hitting the Books

Before

The night before classes everything about Tim was alert and vibrating. He heard music blasting down the corridor, sensed traffic outside, even felt his annoying roommates breathing.

"I was kind of freaking out because I thought: When I wake up at 7:30 tomorrow morning I really, really start to be an actor. I've always said I'm going to forget everything else, chuck everything, and just be an actor. But this was real," he explained.

During

The academically-talented suburban young woman was pretty, popular and cursed with a baby doll voice. In high school, she battled a bimbo image. Finally, earning acceptance to a prestigious university, she felt her first class was a proving ground.

"There were a lot of people in high school who thought I was a fake person. If I didn't come back a success from my Ivy League school, they'd say they were right. These people didn't know me but thought I was a certain way. That made me really angry. We were in the same classes for smart kids together, but they thought I wasn't deep," she said.

Walking into her first biology lecture with 800 students—almost twice the number of her whole high school—she felt pressure to prove herself to her former classmates and herself.

She recalled, "I was like, Wow. The professor was English and god-like. He plunges in. There's no 'Let's review' or 'How many of

you learned this before?' He talks very fast, pacing back and forth, and assumes everyone understands what he says. This kid next to me is taking pages and pages of notes, and kind of hiding what he's writing so I can't see. The professor passes out the syllabus; it's really long and detailed. Right then I hope I can keep up, not get ahead the way I did in high school. After, I bought the book, and it was so heavy. The course felt like a weight on me."

That class impressed her with how competitive and impersonal college was going to be. "I knew I'd never be able to talk to this professor. Whatever I would say would sound so stupid. Definitely in high school, I was a good kid and teachers make a fuss. But in college it's like, 'Oh, this stupid little freshman.' Maybe that's bad for me because I need personal contacts."

At the end of the year, she said, "I had a 2.8, and I'd never had anything less than a 3.8 before. Biology really dragged me down."

Don't look back, other students in enormous lecture groups suggest. "What does it matter if there are 50 or 250 people behind you?" Peter noted.

Another Wisconsin male added, "Nobody minds the large classes. You get to meet more girls that way, and the small group discussions (usually led by teaching assistants) help you understand the material."

At MIT, Michael found his class sizes ranged from 300 to 100 and recitation [discussion] sessions ran to 20-30 students. "There are 300 in Calculus and Organic Chemistry. I sit in front and ignore everyone behind me. In a lecture it doesn't matter how many are listening. I had seven people in my AP Chemistry in high school, but I knew classes were going to be large here."

After

Unhappy first class experiences often lead to the first panicky phone call home.

"I wasn't homesick at all," Anne said of her first Holy Cross days, "except I almost cried twice because my mom's letters were really nice."

But after her first Spanish class, "I felt it was way too easy so I changed to Intermediate 2. But the higher level class was held dur-

ing Biology, which I didn't want to take in the first place and was trying to just get out of the way. Now my whole schedule was messed up. So I called my parents. I was all stressed out. I told them I needed to fill in another course, and this conflicted with that and whatever."

Anne's parents, experienced from their older daughter, said, "You're on your own; you're in college. We don't have a course selection book, and you're not going to want our advice anyhow."

Their no nonsense attitude worked. The next morning, "I got up early and figured out my schedule. Now I'm in a music class that I love and in the right Spanish class. I took care of my first problem here myself," Anne boasted.

Despite the best efforts, incorrect placement, inappropriate and distasteful courses cause anxieties the first days of college. Of the ten principal students in this book, three switched class levels by going through a last-minute flurry of finding replacements, juggling schedules and getting proper signatures before the official drop and add period ended. After that time, classes can sometimes be changed for an extra fee. Three other students found themselves in classes they suspected they might fail. One dropped her course, one got a D and the other failed. The moral is take action early.

Some schools, including Princeton, Harvard and Stanford, offer a "shopping period" during which students visit classes and get a sense of the courses. After a week or so, students finalize their choices. Even then, since many courses are requirements, choices are limited.

In middle school, he planned for high school. In high school, he planned for college. His first day in college, he was already thinking ahead to grad school and the job market. Grades have always been important to him and his parents, and sometimes, he admitted, he has been a grade grubber.

The first English assignment—write an essay—threw him. "I called my parents and said, 'What kind of school is this? Just write a paper, any paper!' I didn't know what they [the English professor] wanted."

He claimed he didn't really expect his parents to help with the paper, but wanted them to understand the difficulties he was facing. Other suburban students said they wanted their parents to

share their suffering a bit in the beginning. Later in the semester they were more likely to share their anxieties with classmates.

Breaking a Habit

But in the beginning, out of habit, students turned to the folks back home.

"Right away I realized I needed a bike to get around campus," Kathy said of sprawling Stanford. "I wanted a used one because of theft problems. I bought one, but found on the way back to the dorm the brakes didn't work. I returned it to the shop and was told the brakes weren't covered on the warranty. I was furious because I could tell this guy was taking advantage of me."

Kathy took the bike to another shop for repairs, but also called her lawyer dad. "I was so angry, and I wanted to make the bike shop owner angry too. I figured a phone call from a New York lawyer would have some effect." It did. The bike store owner called Kathy and suddenly the repair was "no problem."

In retrospect, Kathy said, "That was the first week here and it kind of made me feel I didn't belong on my own. My natural instinct was to call home. If it happened later, I probably would have gone back to the store and gotten things fixed myself."

In addition, Kathy, who had felt fairly powerless as a high school student, started to reconsider her place in the universe. Stanford, with its great reputation and many alums in significant government and business positions, empowered her. After listening to an early discussion panel of students who were active in various social causes, she felt, "I could totally do great things here. When you say you're from Stanford, people actually listen and let you do things."

While some students called home too much in the beginning, others didn't call at all.

From a protective family in suburban Dallas, the first-year Emory student was accustomed to telling her mom almost everything. She hadn't been away from home before except for summer camp. "College felt like summer camp," she said. "[There] you weren't allowed to call your parents, so I didn't call my mom from school."

Later, the student reflected she may not have called because campus freedom seemed so overwhelming to her. "It's really hard

because I'm the first child in the family to go off to college. It's hard to explain different things that happen at college to my mom. I mean, she thinks I didn't see an R-rated movie until I was 17 1/2. I was always a conscientious student. I didn't have a curfew because my boyfriend did. I didn't drink."

At Emory, she changed: "The first frat party I did have a sip of something. But I didn't like the taste. Also, when I first got here I didn't study very much. I'd just go to sleep even if I hadn't done the reading for the next day."

What could she tell her mom?

"One Friday night I was changing clothes to go to a party. My mom calls about 9:30 and asks about my week. I tell her I'm about to go out. 'But it's almost 10 o'clock,' she says. I say, 'So.' Nothing starts till 10 at least.' She was really scared then, and I know the drinking stuff would scare her more. She knows all the drinking and driving statistics, but she doesn't know the real people behind the statistics."

Learning what and what not to tell parents takes time. First-year student administrators often find themselves bridging the gap. "A daughter calls home in tears, saying everything is awful," noted UVM Director of Residential Life Jill Carnaghi. "A half hour later, she's down the hall at a popcorn party and feels better. But the mother doesn't know that, remains worried and calls me. After a few of these calls, you learn how to be good long-distance parents." Meanwhile, considerate first years should call back with all-clear reports.

FIRST CLASS TIPS

1. Don't overreact. It's only the first day of classes, not the first day of the rest of your life.
2. Think of the first days as total immersion in a foreign language. A professor's vocabulary, rapid delivery and intellectual content often become more comfortable after a few sessions.
3. At most schools, frosh will have at least one lecture class that may be as large as the entire student body of a small high school. Sit up front.
4. Large classes usually meet in smaller discussion groups led by teaching assistants (TAs) as well. Here's a good place to ask questions. Some TAs are excellent teachers, some are not. If yours isn't, don't hesitate to get help from the professor, a different TA or your advisor.
5. About advisors: some colleges assign frosh an academic advisor, a member of the faculty who specializes in the student's general interest area. Advisors who are good matches with their advisees are lifelines to first-year survival. Again, if yours isn't, find another.
6. Many professors provide a syllabus of the whole semester's work the first day of class. Don't expect other reminders of what's due when. Get the professor's office hours and perhaps a phone number the first day. If the professor seems inaccessible, contact the TA or even the department head.
7. Getting ahead in college work is unlikely. Keeping up with the work, especially in heavy reading classes, is hard enough.
8. In figuring out a class schedule, try to have several choices in mind for a particular time slot. If your original choice isn't

appropriate for you or is filled, you'll be able to replace it easily.

9. Know the official add/drop dates and the paperwork required to accomplish class changes. Beware of penalty charges and recorded failing grades for late changes.

10. Ask upperclass students which courses and, more important, which professors are good. Some schools like MIT have publications with student comments on classes. Of course, take them all with a grain of salt, but you may be able to establish a consensus on the best and the worst.

11. Sometimes you can get special permission to get into a closed or upper level course. After you talk your way in, be prepared to perform in order to stay there.

12. Expect some shuffling around in courses, even the ones for which you took placement tests. Most students agreed that if you find the course totally impossible, not just hard, drop it.

13. Balance your course load by taking classes that require a variety of work. For example, taking five heavy writing classes in one semester is a bad idea. Taking a course pass/fail is possible on many campuses and may reduce stress and allow for some academic experimentation.

14. College writing assignments may be more general or more specific than high school writing. Thinking rather than regurgitating plot and facts was a change many students reported.

15. Most students said the amount of reading and its level of difficulty were notable as well.

16. As first years tried to do early assignments in their dorm rooms, they noticed differences between all-frosh and mixed-class dorms. In general, the latter were quieter and less unrelentingly social. However, in the end, most first years who chose homogeneous housing were happy with their choice.

17. At the first threat of a problem, many frosh called home. In retrospect, they regretted it. Mostly, parents can't help. Students

also said phoning sent the wrong message. Just when they wanted to be independent, they were showing they weren't.

18. That doesn't mean students shouldn't call home at all. Parents like to know what's going on, even if life isn't going perfectly. They like to feel you're trying to handle it, with a fumble or two. Besides, as Amy noted, if you tell them a little, they may not pry as much.

19. If you do give your parents one of those phone calls from hell, call back later when things have improved. Not too much later.

CHAPTER

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Free at Last ... Now What?

Freedom—within campus rules and personal consciences—was the biggest change for most frosh. But despite parents' nightmares of their children running wild, students say it's the little freedoms that liberated them, and their unfettered adventures were more stretches than free-rein romps.

Late Night Uncensored

"I know it's kind of a small thing," Gretchen said of her first week at Wesleyan, "but my first feeling of total freedom was when our RAs put up a sign up sheet for what movies we wanted to watch on [her dorm] movie night." They were all R-rated. "I never realized before we can pretty much do what we want."

After two months at school, Gretchen decided, "The biggest surprise is that I'm so much in my own. I'm not even aware of the administration. I assume they OK certain things like gay, lesbian, bisexual group meetings, but I don't know for sure. I always knew I'd be on my own, but it's more than I thought."

"The biggest freedom is the lack of a curfew," said a Lehigh frosh from suburban Des Moines, echoing her peers. "You go to one party, come back to the dorm and go out again. My high school friends and I used to go out about 7 p.m. and get home about 12. Here we start going out at 10 and get in about 2. It's nice to come home and not have to deal with your mom and dad. My parents said they never waited up for me, but I always came in to tell them I got home safely."

A first year from a Boston suburb added, "The first time I felt the freedom was the second weekend. We stayed out until 4:30 in the morning. We tiptoed into the dorm, looking over our shoulders. Then we saw that everybody else was still out!"

She suggested parents ease up on restrictions senior year to prepare for college. "The girls who have trouble adjusting—the ones who stay overnight at fraternities, are drunk every night and get themselves in trouble—were very shy in high school, had 12 o'clock curfews and couldn't tell their parents the truth."

"My moment of freedom was being able to go out whenever I wanted to and not tell anyone," an Emory student from an Atlanta suburb recalled. "I realized it when I started to tell my roommate I was going to the library. I stopped myself. Nobody cared if I went or not. Grabbing my book and going to the library isn't a wild thing, but it felt good. I feel the same way about classes. I'm free to go or not. I choose to go, and have only missed one so far, which is unusual for me."

Mac's first freedom at Emory was a little forced. "The first night was kind of boring. I hung out in my room and went to sleep about midnight. My roommate disappeared for a few hours. When he returned he woke me up and insisted I get drunk right then, at 2:30 a.m. So I obliged. After all, it was supposed to be the first day of freedom!" he recounted.

Toasting Freedom

The freedom to get drunk is compelling for students who usually had a breath-sniffing parent awaiting their return at night. In general, students who drank a little in high school, drank a little more in college. Some students who were teetotalers in high school, tried alcohol. Except for a few blowout occasions (usually in the very beginning), not one of the students interviewed for this book strayed far from his or her high school drinking pattern. Most notable, those students who were committed to not drinking, didn't, and reported no pressure to change their behavior. But, make no mistake, drinking is a significant campus activity.

He was from a suburb in Kentucky, a Methodist stronghold that frowned on alcohol. "Once I experimented with alcohol when I was a freshman in high school, but never outside my own home. My parents found out—I was so stupid—I was stealing my dad's stuff. From that point on I never touched it, until the summer before college when I had something on occasion. But the first few weeks here [Emory] I was drinking all the time. At first I hated it. But then I started liking it a lot. At that time, all the guys on the hall would drink as a group because, as freshmen, we couldn't go to frat parties. Then I started hanging out with guys who didn't drink. If I'm drinking, I like to do it with friends. So now I very seldom drink."

"The kids who got drunk in junior high used it as an excuse to act weird and be sociable," said a Wisconsin frosh. "I didn't like that or want any part of it. I didn't even get into drinking in eleventh grade when most other kids did. I still wanted to be able to be sociable on my own. At times I felt excluded because all my friends were drinking. There was one girl who also didn't drink and we became really good friends. She's at another college now and has tried alcohol too. I'm comfortable with it now."

Being away from home, not feeling pressured by the crowd and feeling less self-conscious about acting silly led to his comfort. In fact, he said, maybe he was too comfortable on his first night on the town.

While on tour with a campus singing group, he went to a bar. "I'm the youngest and I'm like, 'Hey, guys, are you sure I'm going to be able to get in here?'," he recalled. "They say, 'Just stick with us.' We get a big table and a couple girls show their IDs. It was assumed everyone else was of age too. We get big pitchers of beer and start drinking. I was thirsty and kept pouring them down, not thinking about it. I had five big mugs in a short time.

"At that point, I'm goofy and laughing and have to go to the bathroom. Somebody had to walk me there, and I remember saying to the girl helping me, 'Act normal like we're sober. Pretend we're talking—blah, blah.' Boy, I really must have looked stupid.

"Then the tab comes and it's $90. My eyes pop out. Nobody has enough money, but I have a credit card. Everyone says I should pay and they'll pay me back. So I go up to the bartender while he's doing the credit card. He's wiping off the bottles and things. And

I'm like, 'How you doing?' and tell him we're in a choir. He asks what we sing. I say he wouldn't like it—15th-century stuff. He says he might. Then I turn around and there's this scary guy in a red, white and blue USA leather jacket. I turn to this girl, and, in what I think is a whisper, say, 'That guy in that jacket really pisses me off.' She's trying to keep me quiet. Then I had to sign the credit card. My friends helped me and guided my hand. I kept the receipt. You can't read it at all."

It reminds him how the alcohol affected him, how insulting he was and how he could have gotten into a losing fight. Most other first-time drunks regretted their embarrassing behavior.

First Love

"The best part of college is knowing you've got the freedom to do whatever you want and not be checked up on," said Anne. "But also that's almost the scariest thing too. I mean, no one is there to say, 'Look at yourself. You're not getting enough sleep. You're not taking care of yourself. What are you doing?' "

One thing Anne was doing after a few weeks was having a boyfriend, much to her surprise. "I feel good but stupid," she admitted. "I was clueless that he liked me as more than a friend." She assumed his girlfriend was someone who was her good friend also, and she was worried about moving in on someone else's territory. But she and the other girl "had these huge conversations in the dark on the floor, crying" and worked things out.

Then Anne and the guy paired off. "I thought about that he lives in the same dorm and what would happen if we broke up," she said, "but it was too cool a thing to pass up. Cooler than I ever imagined."

One night Anne, her boyfriend and some friends drove into Boston. They were stargazing when someone said, "You know we could stay here all night and no one would know or get mad." Anne noted, "Not that we had anything to do all night, and it was already beginning to get boring. We weren't even proving a point, because there was no one to prove one to. But it was a cool feeling; it could be done."

She attended a small all-girls Catholic high school and had known most of her 33 classmates since seventh grade. Shy and not one to date or go to drinking parties, she and her best friend mainly hung out together on weekends. She chose a Catholic college because she felt safe there and assumed other students would share her values.

She was also the first member of her family to live on a college campus. Her parents had commuted from their parents' homes to college. She was the first grandchild and the first of three children in her immediate family to go off. "This was a new experience for everyone in my family. In the beginning, I did feel pressure because of that. Everyone wanted a full report. Everything was a big deal," she recalled.

Mostly they wanted to know about romance. "They always wanted me to have a boyfriend. They bugged me all through high school. But I didn't realize what it was going to entail until I got here."

She met someone on the first day of orientation. "I had just said good-bye to my parents and was crying and scared silly. I come into the dining hall and I'm looking for my group. I end up at this table with one guy and the orientation leader. So we started talking and it turned out we were the only ones who attended some group meetings. I found myself going to activities because he was going to be there."

Now she had something to say when her family asked about a boyfriend. Still, she wasn't sure he was the real thing. "I think we were really good friends at first, and I was wondering what would happen. Then we went to a dance together and that was the real beginning," she said.

"The beginning of the end," she added ruefully. "I was shocked that I got a boyfriend when I got here. I think I was thrilled with the whole notion, even if I wasn't that thrilled with him. This is very un-PC, but I liked knowing I was someone's. One day I was coming out of his room, and I heard someone say, 'Hey, there's Jack's [not his real name] girl.' Nobody had ever thought that way about me before."

The romance continued smoothly through December. "Things were fine until exams came and there was a lot of stress on everyone. He got sick and went home for vacation early. Over Christmas

he wrote me a letter that sent me soaring. I wrote back, but there was no response."

Still, she couldn't wait to return to school and see him again. But "We got back and nothing was happening. We really weren't seeing each other anymore. Then one night he had his car on campus and made a big deal about going out with me. We were going to Boston and whatever. At the last minute he tells me he has a previous engagement and won't say what it is. Later he just shows up. I've got sweats on, my hair is dripping wet and I'm wearing my stupid clogs. And he says, 'Why aren't you ready?' We had a big fight, and finally he left. I ended up eating a lot of chocolate and having a lot of girl talk."

The relationship was over, and she mainly blamed herself. "I thought maybe I was doing things wrong and wasn't acting the right way since I'd never been in a relationship of this magnitude. I felt guilty, and didn't understand why he wasn't talking to me. I cried every day for two weeks."

Looking back, she said some things were wrong from the start, but she ignored them. If she had been more savvy, they might not have gotten together in the first place.

In and Out of Love with Love

Others who found and lost romance for the first time at college claim their mistake was being more enthralled with the phenomenon than with the individual. A Lehigh frosh said, "I never had a boyfriend in high school. I got one here right away. He was a junior, and turned out to be a complete dirtbag. I walked in on him with another girl. I was glad it happened early on because I hadn't done anything serious with him. I sort of suspected something about him from the outset. In retrospect, I was only attracted to him because he was this big junior and my image of what things would be like in college."

At a nondating high school, Mac dated. At Emory, where groups are still more common than couples pairing off, Mac also expected to date, and right away. As reported before, he spotted someone during orientation, called her, but she didn't return his attentions.

"I was disappointed but not depressed or anything. There are other fish in the sea that is Emory," he wrote at the time.

Three weeks later, after joining the cross-country team, he found one. Charlotte [not her real name] was also on the team. She and Mac hit it off even though they were different. He explained, "She's very religious and I'm not. That's more interesting than conflicting. She thinks of people by 'loving' them, whereas I think of 'respecting' them." He adds that she doesn't drink, and although he drank seven of the first ten days of college, he hasn't touched alcohol since hooking up with her. At that point he wrote, "I can tell that we are going to last for awhile."

One thing Mac and Charlotte had in common was recently failed high school romances. That may be what parted them three weeks later. "[Charlotte] and I are history," he wrote. "She had just broken up with her boyfriend before she got here. When things between us started getting a little serious, she discovered she simply wasn't ready. I could totally understand her, but it still filled me with self-doubt."

Unfortunately, as Mac and several others observed of their failed romances, breakups occur at the same time as other stresses are building. In Mac's case, he was struggling on the cross-country team and falling behind in class work. The problem at college, they said, is that you can't keep pressures separate and there is no place to be alone to sort them out.

Mac also discovered after the breakup that he had lost his place among male friends. By pairing off in the beginning, he hadn't made as many of the same sex friends as he might have, and missed having them to fall back on after his romance failed. In the end, male and female frosh insist, same sex friends are more important than lovers.

Breakup Close Up

Breaking up with a person who most likely will still be in the same classes, share the same friends and maybe even the same dorm and bathroom is uncomfortable. "When friendships or romances end there's no way to get away from it," observed Anne at Holy Cross. "It's always there looking you in the face."

Mac handled breaking up with someone he was going to see everyday by trying to remain friendly; his former girlfriend took the opposite tack and tried to ignore him. Anne, whose situation was complicated by living and learning in the same small unit within her school with her ex, used both techniques.

Anne sensed something was different in her relationship after Thanksgiving vacation. But then he arranged an elaborate date. "We go into Boston, to Symphony Hall, and see George Winston play. It was totally awesome. We had fourth row seats. After we went out. It was a dream date. I was so on top of the world," she recalled.

Two days later, he stopped speaking to her. But she forced a confrontation. "He said he wasn't sure what he was feeling and because of that he thought it was only fair to me that we breakup."

Again, the combination academic-social punch hit. "it was the worst timing ever," Anne said. "He came to my room the night before I had a huge paper due and an exam. We talked until 4 a.m. I could barely keep my eyes open during my exam, they were so swollen from crying."

Anne also felt saddened that her parents continued to assume she was handling everything is her usual capable way.

And, in a way, she was. Anne insisted that she and her ex get together over Christmas vacation with other Holy Cross friends so that being together in a group at school would seem more natural. She says it worked, and now the two of them make an effort to have dinner together once a week. "We have a friendly relationship," she claimed. "But I almost wish it [the romance] had never happened because we can't get back the original group dynamic."

Amy at UVM also regretted the effect of lost love on the group. But she was the one to stop speaking to end the romance. "I had been seeing him for a couple months. I was friends with him first. Then we went out a few times, and I was like, well, I'll try it. Then I stayed going out with him because it was convenient. He lived on my floor, I knew all his friends, and it was really fun. But I wasn't really attracted to him."

Soon "convenient" wasn't enough. "We didn't sit down and say that's it, it's over. It was: he stopped going down to my room, I

stopped going to his. It was pretty much understood between us," Amy explained.

"It was very, very awkward for the first three weeks. The first week we didn't say anything to each other. You'd see the person and not say a word, not make eye contact. That's harsh, but you need to get your space. The second week you say hello. But you're still awkward and cold. I remember I was on my way to class, and he was going to the shower. He looked at me, and I looked at him and said, 'Hey, what's up?' He smiled, and that was fine. Of course, everyone on the floor knows what's going on, and that's hard too. But by the third week, you can talk a little more."

"Now we're great friends," Amy continued, perhaps overstating the case. "I knew it was just a matter of time, but I needed not to deal with him for awhile. I didn't hate him or want him to hate me. If I had been a bitch, he would have been awful also. He was acting off what I was doing. The only difficult part is that I'm friends with his friends. I knew them before we were together, and I'm not going to stop being friends with them now."

The silent treatment lasted longer for Mac. On the last day of school, he walked past his old girlfriend and her family. She called out, "Hey," and smiled at him for the first time since October.

Romantic Baggage

Unlike Mac, Anne and Amy, many suburban students arrive at college secure in their high school romances and determined not to find any new love interests.

They had dated for a year before she left for a New England college and he for a western school. She loved her new school, joined a sorority and was amazed how easily she adjusted to campus life. He was unhappy, and remained unconnected to his new school.

"We said we weren't even going to see other people because we liked each other so much," she recalled. "But even after the first few weeks I noticed there were a lot of people I could see myself with. I think he did also, but he's got problems at home so he's more holding on to me than I am to him."

By October, she reported, "Right now we don't know what to do because we still really like each other. We're allowed to see other people now. We're going to talk about it at Thanksgiving."

Thanksgiving of frosh year was a major point for talking turkey about old romances. Most couples broke up by that time or got together during the short vacation and parted immediately after.

Several young women who were more academically talented than their high school boyfriends and attended more prestigious institutions grew apart from them. A young woman at an Ivy League school tried to continue with her boyfriend at a less competitive school through phone calls and visits. But he was never comfortable on her campus and she resented visiting him so often.

"I started acting more distant, and he noticed and was upset. It was surprising that he wanted to hold on more than I did. When we left high school I think I liked him more than he liked me," she said.

The summer after frosh year, he still wanted her to be his girlfriend exclusively. She wanted more freedom. "You think everything is going to be the same and it ends," she said of college separations, including leaving her high school girlfriends. "That might be a good thing, but it's sad too."

One young man who dropped out after the first year said if he hadn't had such a "smart high school girlfriend," he might have attended a technical school more suited to his talents or not have gone to college at all and been happier. "But you couldn't have told me that at the time," he added.

"I never had any intention of going to college with a boyfriend," said a young woman from a suburb in New Jersey. But she started dating an older guy at the end of senior year in high school. So although she imagined "coming to college without any ties, being a new person and developing myself" as a Wesleyan frosh, she was attached to a senior at another Connecticut college.

In a way, having a boyfriend made starting college easier because she wasn't desperate to find romance. But he also kept her apart from her new community. She reported, "We ran into problems because it was six weeks into school and I hadn't spent a weekend here. I was going home [to New Jersey] every weekend to be with him. Finally, I said to him, 'I love you, and it's very easy and

comfortable to stay in our little world, but I want to shake things up a little. There are all these interesting people here, and I want to hang out with them and develop friendships."

But he didn't want to stay on his campus without her so he visited her. "It was awful," she remembered. "It's really hard to have anyone visit you at college, especially an old boyfriend. As a first semester freshman, you take someone to a party and you're trying so hard to talk to people yourself, you can't really say, 'Here's my established group of friends and here's a new person, now let's all make him or her feel part of us.'

"The weekend he came someone else was pursuing me, and there was a lot of intrigue going on. I was trying to ignore it and kept saying brightly, 'Let's go to another party.' He said, 'I came to spend time with you and I don't care about the parties.' I said I needed things to be a little bit more casual. I would like us to have a relationship but wanted to see other people. He said he couldn't handle that. We went back and forth, saying this isn't over forever and that we were completely in love. The truth is, he probably was in love with me, but I don't think I was in love with him. He seems to have gotten over it though because I heard that he's living with this freshman woman. I think he really doesn't want to graduate from college. He wants to stay the same; I want to change."

Far from his home in a suburb in Ohio and plunked down in the southern culture at Emory, one frosh really missed his girlfriend of two years' standing. "The horrible part was realizing that this person you had seen three or four times a week just wasn't going to be there. She was really my best friend at that point. We both knew we should breakup because otherwise it would get in the way of meeting other people. Initially, I was the one who wanted to end it before I got to college, but I couldn't go through with it.

"Then I got here and really missed her. She visited during orientation, which was weird but not that big of a deal. It was a bigger deal when I went back home. At home you forget all the college stuff, and you're right back to senior year in high school."

But it wasn't quite the same. "During Christmas break I kept calling her just to keep in touch more than anything. She wants to make plans to go out. I say OK, but I'm not that interested. Then all of a sudden this other boy she's seeing asks her out for the same

time I had. She went with him," he recalled. He was hurt that she was the one who ended the relationship, and that it happened at home where her presence was more significant.

Ending high school romances at college is easier, at least for the one on campus. "I had a girlfriend who is still in high school. We had been going out for five months, and it was getting serious when I left for school," reported a Wisconsin frosh. "I sensed it wasn't going to last a couple weeks after I got here. But I thought well, we'll see. We talked maybe three times a week on the phone. She came up here a few times. I told her, 'I'm experiencing new things, growing in different ways and learning about myself. You're in high school and can't really do that because high school doesn't let you.' She didn't feel the same way."

One of his friends added, "There's no such thing as a long-distance relationship. It's easier to find somebody nearby and you see her every day."

The other Wisconsin student countered, "I don't think the distance matters as much as the experiences. In my case, she's not that far away. But the feeling of being on your own—making your own bedtime, waking up when you want, doing whatever you want—that's what makes a difference.

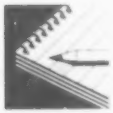
"There are 12 people on this floor who came to college with girlfriends who are still in high school or who went to another school. Only one relationship is left."

Not So Free After All

Many suburban students were used to driving around their towns in unlocked cars at any hour and returning to unlocked homes in neighborhoods where the most visible crime is mailbox bashing. These students bridled under safety restrictions on roaming campuses and nearby towns at night and alone. They resented dorm security measures as well, while appreciating their necessity.

Women and men understood the advisability of calling the campus escort services in certain situations, but hated to have to limit their activities. In addition, many students complained about the slowness of the services. But, mainly, they hated to have to add worry about their physical safety to all their other concerns.

Yet, the greatest limit on personal liberty came from the students' character. "Freedom," laughed a University of Illinois frosh a thousand miles from home. "I've never really felt free. I just won't let myself go because I know I have to do my work. My parents are divorced, and my dad puts a lot of pressure on me to do well in school. I add to that because I'm a perfectionist. I want the best things in life, and I want to be successful. I'll do whimsical things and things off the top of my head, but I'm always looking into the future and seeing how what I'm doing will affect the future." He was not the only one.



FREEDOM TIPS

1. Suburban students felt freer at college than they had expected. Freedom came in the form of little liberties such as opting for racy movies or not making a bed. The biggest freedom—even for students from permissive families—was the lack of a curfew and an adult checking their whereabouts.

2. Contrary to a parent's worst nightmare, students, in general, didn't run wild with their new freedom. For all the talk about becoming new people, many students stuck close to their high school patterns and replaced outside rules with self-imposed restrictions. As much as students longed for freedom, it scared them too.

3. However, many students did experiment with their old limits—staying out all night, drinking too much, having casual sex—early in the school year. After a short spree, they usually returned to a modified version of their former more conservative selves. Beware, students warned, your friends never let you forget the foolish things you may do during these experiments. Sometimes, students added, their experiments felt a little forced—i.e. they felt they should try something outrageous but didn't exactly want to do it.

4. Drinking is a major activity and drugs are at least a minor one on many campuses. But students reported less pressure to participate in either than in high school. They also found others who shared their level of interest in alcohol and drugs. For more information, see Chapter 16.

5. Falling in love is another available freedom, and many students who had never had boyfriends and girlfriends before paired off immediately. Later, most regretted it. They said they missed out on making more friends and limited their social experiences. This information, of course, will not stop anyone

from falling in love the first hour at college. However, try to incorporate romance into a larger social group, students advised. Then if you break up, you won't be alone.

6. Students who found instant love complained that their romances were getting complicated just as academics were heating up too.

7. Breaking up with a partner on campus is difficult because there is little privacy and space between people. Students said they had to create artificial barriers at the beginning of break-ups. For example, they stopped speaking and made elaborate efforts to avoid seeing each other. After the break-up was established, they felt they could ease up and perhaps be friends with former romantic partners.

8. Maintaining romances with partners still in high school or on different campuses was almost impossible. Most long-distance loves faltered from the beginning and the majority had dissolved by December vacation.

9. Fear of crime was a major limit on campus freedom. Suburban students, who were used to free movement in safe neighborhoods, resented the curbs on their independence.

CHAPTER

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Meanwhile Back in the Classroom

The academic year has a rhythm, starting soft and low and building to a crescendo after about five weeks. Some students found themselves lulled early on, only to be jolted by first exams and papers at that time.

Early Success

One frosh floated through the first few weeks at Emory. She did some of the assigned reading and problems, and slept a lot. Even so, she got a 95 on her first test in Chemistry. "I think I took that grade for granted and stopped working," she recalls. "I was like, well, I barely studied for that test and did fine. I guessed what people had told me was true: college is learning what you can get away with. In high school you have to do busy work, little homework stuff and pop quizzes. But in college, if you haven't done your reading for the day, you just sit in class and nobody bothers you."

Later she found herself playing catch up and realizing the playing field was different. "I was one of the smart kids in high school," she said. "But here certain people amaze me. This guy in my math and Biology classes comes up with incredible ideas. People like that have a natural ability. I have some natural ability, but I'll have to work for what I get."

Not So Fast

"Finally it hit me," said Mac. "I looked at my Psych syllabus and realized there was a test in nine days. I was like, oh no. The test was on the first five chapters, and I was barely through the second. I was working hard, but note taking was going slowly."

Mac went to the professor for advice. "But he really didn't have anything to say. He just said not to sweat it and to read the outlines at the end of the chapters before reading the chapters. Then, he thought, I'd be able to skim through and get the main ideas. But I felt he assumed I was just a regular freshman who was kind of stressing out, and he was trying to calm me."

Academics were particularly tense for Mac, who had never academically strained himself in high school but believed he could be a high achiever if he tried. If he failed the test, he would assume he had been fooling himself for years. So, even though Mac doubted the professor's advice, he followed it. "I got an 89 so I was pretty happy," he reported.

Not all frosh exam stories had happy endings. "My first test was in philosophy, and I thought I had prepared enough," recalled a former high school honors student. "Just before the test, the professor said to change something on it. I thought he said to omit two questions. In high school sometimes they do that. But I guess I didn't hear him right, and I didn't ask any questions. Also, I answered in short answers, not what he wanted. So I failed my first test. I was really scared because I realized I didn't know how to take a college test. I made a lot of mistakes, but I never make those same mistakes now [second semester]."

"In some ways, I was surprised about the work," said Kathy. "I had heard stories about it, and my mom had said how much work there was, but I had always hoped that was other schools and other times. I didn't exactly think it would be true for me."

In high school, Kathy had done her work, but never after 9 p.m., and excelled. At Stanford, she found the same techniques didn't work. "The workload is the same [as in high school], but I'm doing more of it. For example, there was a lot of reading last year in Western Civilization, but I didn't do it all. Here, if you don't read everything, you miss a whole chunk of questions on the exam."

Psychology, a class of 300, was a particular stumbling block for Kathy. "I studied the wrong way for the first exam," she reported. "I studied lots of facts, and could answer the multiple choice parts. But I wasn't connecting ideas, so I failed the short answer and essay parts."

Kathy went to see the professor, who suggested that she study by grouping ideas together. She tried that approach for the next exam. "That time I did well on the essay and short answer, but pretty much failed the multiple choice. So after two low D exams, I was heading straight for a D in the class and dropped it."

She claims dropping a course didn't depress her or make her question her abilities; it was just a practical move. In fact, at highly selective schools like Stanford, where legend has it you must be God or a swimmer to be admitted, students felt the intellectual security of arriving at an elite haven. As Michael at MIT explained, "The competition between students really isn't there. The professors are putting so much on you that it's not worth it to add more."

The area where competition remains cutthroat, students at other schools said, is in preprofessional classes such as pre-med science courses.

The threatening aspect of top level schools is, since academic skill is a given, students are inclined to want to distinguish themselves in other ways. The feeling is: OK, you're smart, but everyone here is. What else are you?

As Kathy observed, "I don't feel everyone else is a genius. But it does seem that everyone else is really good at something. In my dorm there are Olympians and math and science whizzes. There are people here who gave up full scholarships at other places because they really wanted to come here. And there are people here on scholarships because Stanford really wanted them. I don't feel inferior exactly, but I am a bit jealous sometimes. I don't feel like I don't belong here, but I don't feel that I excel in anything either."

Endless Nights

At so-called second-tier schools like Lehigh, the academic competition can feel more intense. For some students these good schools were Ivy League-safeties (fairly certain acceptances if they didn't get into the Ivies), while they were reaches for other students.

Frosh classes become the battleground between those who breezed in and those who struggled to make it. Some tension comes from not knowing if you're sitting next to a kid rejected by Dartmouth by a hair or one who was tutored every day since sixth grade. In either case, the pressure is on to prove yourself early.

Kristen knew she would have to work to do well in college, but was confident she could do it. Her first month, during which she split her time between soccer and studying, produced mixed results.

She excelled in English, but calculus and psychology were rougher. First, she was put off by the calculus class size of 50. "It was a little surprising because Weston math classes are small and the teachers focus on each student. Now my professor doesn't know any student and doesn't really want to. He seems so smart, almost too smart," she reported. "But the TA (teaching assistant) is really nice, and you can go to her for extra help."

Still, her first calculus quiz grade was a shock. "Out of 10, I got 3," she laughed a few weeks later. "I was so nervous because I didn't know what to study, but now I'm like whatever, and they are getting better."

Kristen's early optimism proved unfounded. She claims now her worst mistake first year was not dropping calculus.

Unlike calculus, Kristen was prepared for a large (100 students) psychology class and loved the professor. But she misgauged the time it required. Echoing other students' early observations, she said, "There's a lot more work than in high school, but you have more time to do it. You get a syllabus so you know what to expect. It's not like they give you an assignment that's due tomorrow. It's more like you do it in your own time. But if you procrastinate, you're really in trouble. I did procrastinate a bit in the beginning, especially with reading."

She learned the hard way—from her first college all-nighter. Way behind in the reading for a psych test the next day, Kristen sought a quiet study spot in her dorm. "The only place I could find was the kitchen on the bottom floor. It got really late, and I was all alone. It was so hot, I started to fall asleep. So I opened a window, and then it was freezing. There I was drinking cup after cup of coffee, shaking and reading these chapters. I thought I'd never finish."

She did and got a 72, just above the class average.

Unlike Kristen who had pulled two all-nighters in high school, Gretchen did her high school homework by the clock. Since she had participated in sports, "I had only two hours to get all my work done so I worked really intensely. Here you've got more time to get the work done so you work longer."

The problem is, as an Ithaca College frosh noted, "You need more time because of the quality of work expected." Writing a technically correct paper isn't enough, he said, "You've really got to think before you write."

That's what Gretchen experienced in Introduction to Religion. "I was having tons of problems with that class," she explained. "Two professors share teaching the course, which meets for an hour and a half twice a week, and there's tons of reading, all hard. One of the professors is very hard to follow, very abstract."

For the first paper, "I had to translate the question before I could even try to answer it," Gretchen recalled. The long process was difficult, but exhilarating too. "I was thoroughly combing through the reading to write the essay. It was stuff that I've never read about and really interesting. The whole idea of the class itself is interesting—trying to define religion. I never knew that it was so impossible to define something, and that people would go on for 40 pages trying to come up with an appropriate definition."

And very different from high school. Maybe that's why former honor role student Gretchen was "thrilled" with her C+ on the paper.

The first religion exam posed even a greater challenge. It was a take-home test of three essay questions. Gretchen sat down at a computer about 5 p.m. and finished the next morning. She described the sensation: "You're sitting there and it's 2:30 a.m. and your neck hurts and you want to go to bed. You think, I've just got a couple more pages, and how am I going to do this? You work through that phase and get to about 4 a.m. Then you figure, in only a couple more hours it'll be morning and I'll be done. You see the dusk when you begin. Then you finish and see the sun come up." Again, Gretchen was delighted with her B-.

The last student you would expect to resort to an all-nighter is calm, organized Michael. But MIT made him do it. "I've had to com-

pletely change my sleep cycle," he reported after a few weeks. "I sleep as late as possible and go to bed between 1 and 3. I'm not used to that at all."

Problem sets for a single class might require six hours, Michael found from the beginning. Yet, he said, the work wasn't that hard.

By November, Michael changed his mind. "This is a great place but I'm overworked. The workload has risen on an exponential curve. They broke us in gradually, and the work comes in cycles."

The apogee occurred in April, and that's when he endured his first all-nighter. "I had two weeks when the workload was unbelievable," he said, "and to top things off, it was the best weather we'd had since August." So on a beautiful day Michael sat in front of MIT's million dollar Cray supercomputer.

To accommodate hundreds of students given the same assignment that uses this high power system, the computer lab requires them to sign up for sessions. At peak periods, students must sign up for several, often nonconsecutive, sessions to complete an assignment. So a student might have one session at the computer from 4-6 p.m. and another at 2-4 a.m.

Here's how Michael's all-nighter went: "Yesterday around 3 or 4 p.m. I spent two hours in the lab trying to get ready for the actual lab. Then I spent another hour in my room going over some stuff because I hadn't done the reading and needed time to assimilate 12 pages of code. In high school I might not have done the reading, but I could have learned the material from class lectures. Here, I can't.

"I went outside for about an hour, and then hacked around on a Beta version of OS/2 I was trying to install on my room computer. That was for fun.

"About 8 p.m. I went to the Student Center and picked up some science fiction books. At 9 p.m. I grabbed dinner and talked with friends for an hour and a half. Then I went to a weekly bible discussion. I am interested in the subject, but it's also a way to procrastinate.

"By 11 p.m. I know I'm in trouble because I didn't get too far in the lab before, and by this time the computer lab is going to be jam-packed with all the people who have the same lab due the next day. My friend and I arrived at the lab at 11:30, and had signed up for a computer until after 1. Then the next person kicked us off, so we played Frisbee for half an hour outside in the dark. We kind of

dithered and did some work until 2, at which point we got the computer again. My friend left at 5 a.m., and I worked until 8:30 this morning. All for one lab."

Then Michael had breakfast and tried to stay awake for his 10 a.m. class. That afternoon he was pale but alert. "This is the first time I've stayed up literally the whole night and gotten zero sleep," he said. "There have been a bunch of times where I've gotten four hours sleep, but this was different." Why? "It's an increase in the difficulty and quality of the work expected. I spent all those hours at the lab last night, and it wasn't because I was stuck on anything. It was just a difficult lab."

Michael's former classmates agreed, if college work was hard for him, it's hard for everyone.

CLASSROOM TIPS

1. Academic demands usually build to a peak the fifth week of school. Important exams are given and papers are due then. Students who have been dreaming through a blur of social and academic activities are hit with concrete reality.

2. Good grades on these first requirements may give students a false sense of security. On the other hand, students who never had low grades before may get them now. In either case, don't overreact. These grades do not reflect your value as a person or student.

3. But they do indicate where you are starting in particular courses. Look at the results of your early efforts and analyze what did and didn't work for you. If you had to pull all-nighters to get the work done, reorganize your study schedule. If skipping classes and/or studying in the wrong place are preventing learning, now is the time to change.

4. If poor skills in areas such as reading or note taking are holding you back, find help on campus. Most colleges have learning centers and tutors. If not, contact the dean's office.

5. Talk to your professor or teaching assistant. Yes, they are flesh and blood people, and some actually enjoy talking to students. But don't expect miracles. Although students weren't always satisfied with the results of this talk, in some cases, they thought the professor was impressed with their concern. Students in large lecture classes sometimes felt more like individuals after meeting with the instructors.

6. Don't look for excuses not to work, but if you are truly unqualified for a particular course, this may be the time to drop it. Check with your academic advisor and find out the deadlines and penalties for dropping a class.

7. Not keeping up with the readings and other daily assignments are the most common reasons for early academic problems. Students found some difficulty adjusting to doing work that wasn't checked every day. The most successful students pretended work was due anyway.

8. Many students said college work, especially in the beginning, was only a degree harder than high school assignments. But most added that the amount of work was significantly greater.

CHAPTER

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ABCs of PC

Campus political correctness—PCness—has become a joke. Movies spoof college vegetarians pelted with meatballs and "Saturday Night Live" sketches twit Antioch College's informed consent sex policy. But assessing what is socially and politically acceptable on campus is no laughing matter. And although Bob Dylan was right—it doesn't take a weatherman to figure out which way the wind blows—suburban students from temperate political and social climates transplanted to hot and heavy campus atmospheres may need some conditioning to adjust.

Generally, students picked schools where they sensed student body attitudes on political action, racial and gender issues, emphasis on community service and career training matched their own. Those few choosing schools they suspected would challenge their beliefs were stunned. "I knew this place was liberal," said Peter at Wisconsin, "But I didn't realize how liberal."

Most students were awed by how much others cared about political issues and how much they seemed to know. Amy was floored by the bare-breasted young women who marched against Playboy's efforts to recruit models on campus. "During the election there were so many rallies. People got so into it," a Cornell first year remarked. "Students made these speeches. I was never really into politics and was surprised how much they believed what they were saying. How can they know for sure?" A Yale frosh said, "Issues like abortion are really, really important to some people here. It's not like they have a pet idea because their dad told them about it." A University of Colorado student agreed that his

peers seemed to have thought out their positions more than he had, adding, "Being supportive of an idea was much less trendy and more meaningful at college."

After realizing the impact of campus politics, some students became disillusioned, annoyed or frightened. Gay rights, women's rights and racial equality were fine in theory, for many frosh. But when interest groups' activism interfered with their sleep, class time or threatened their own equanimity, they objected.

All the students considered themselves open-minded and liberal in spirit, if not in political outlook. Yet they found more to challenge their views than they expected, and felt inexperienced in a political milieu. Leaving homogeneous towns, they craved more diversity, but discovered living with it was complicated. In the end, although they had underestimated the impact of their schools' sociopolitical atmosphere, most agreed they wouldn't have changed their college choice because of it. But they would have been more sensitive to it.

An Embarrassment of Riches

Suburban students found just introducing themselves and telling where they were from was their first political statement.

The spoiled brat image stereotyped many frosh, especially those from better-known suburbs. "People from the city are really tuned into making fun of suburban Long Island, the accent and everything," a Wesleyan frosh said. "They think they know all about it—the whole BMWs-Mercedes-North Shore ridiculousness kind of Great Gatsby life. But they don't."

Even more frustrating, Kristen encountered prejudice from a teacher. Her TA in English assigned an essay on corporate America. The essays were returned with low grades and a tirade. "She found a lot of the essays looked down on the poor in society," Kristen said. "She blew up at the class, and said we were making horrible assumptions. 'You're all rich and none of you had to work for your education.' That really offended me because I worked really hard to get in here and so did a lot of other kids in my class." What especially surprised Kristen is that the TA looked suburban herself.

Several Weston students were relieved that their small suburb was relatively unknown away from home and thought they had escaped the "Scarsdale Syndrome." But when they placed it in Fairfield County, they were tagged with snobbery and sometimes bigotry. Far away at Stanford, Kathy, who is African-American laughed, "For those who know it, I usually try to disprove the Weston stereotype that is: I've got my million-dollar mansion and my Benz in the driveway. I go to the club every day, and I'm blonde—mostly out of a bottle."

After a few months, she found, "People are more open-minded here. A Stanford student can be anybody. You can wear whatever you want, be whatever religion you want. There's a Native American who believes her people originate from corn. When I told people in Weston about that, they're, 'Oh, my god.' But here people say, 'That's interesting. Tell me more about it.' In fact, if you are run-of-the-mill, people aren't really interested."

Still, some minority students, while appreciating all this open-mindedness, resented being objects of interest on campuses. They felt less like students and more like topics in a Diversity 101 syllabus.

Don't ask, don't tell, is an approach some suburbanites adopted. A quiet, unassuming Wesleyan frosh from Bryn Mawr, Pennsylvania recalled, "The first day here I heard someone talking about the Main Line [an elite group of Philadelphia suburbs] in a very negative way. I didn't say anything because it wasn't directed at me. But it bothered me. It's not all one way. There's a variety of incomes and races, but the images that make it so famous are the ones that conjure up the negative things." She usually says that she's from outside Philadelphia.

Keep a low profile, advised some students. "I don't feel I have to apologize for my things," said a suburban student from Iowa. "But I try not to show them that much. I'm not really embarrassed, but it does kind of set me apart." When she received two gold bracelets for her birthday, she added them to others she usually wore thinking no one would notice. "But my friends saw them. They said, 'Oh, you got more!' I tried to blow it off but it made me uncomfortable."

A student from Westchester County (NY) at Tufts learned that matter-of-fact description can sound like bragging. "In my town, we're kind of average, not really wealthy at all. But one day in the beginning I was talking to some girls on my hall and it slipped out that we had a pool. I could feel their resentment, and I've been careful since."

A frosh at University of Colorado remarked, "The stereotype was about my whole state and about being from faraway. They say, 'Oh, you're from Connecticut. How well-off are you?'"

To prevent such out-of-stater awe, Peter told his Wisconsin friends he was paying half his expenses. "It seemed like they were all getting some financial aid and the in-staters were paying a lot less anyhow, so it made me feel more normal," he explained.

A Wesleyan frosh from a New Jersey suburb observed, "There are all these wealthy people here whose parents want to instill values in their kids that they shouldn't just count on their money. Most people try to seem like they're struggling whether they are or not."

In contrast, a Lehigh student felt among the less privileged. "There are a lot of people there with family money. It seems like a lot of people even have buildings named after them," he said. "It seems like you're either on financial aid or you can afford to pay for college for 12 kids at a time. I'm not on financial aid but I felt it was a big sacrifice for me to go to college. I didn't see many people like me—in the middle."

At first you might be self-conscious about coming from a suburb with an elitist image like Grosse Pointe or Scarsdale. Then you find a lot of people have similar backgrounds, others discovered. "I didn't volunteer where I was from, but I would say if asked," a first-year Yalie recalled. "It turned out people from other countries and states don't really know Fairfield County from a hole in the wall. Besides, they have their own Fairfields near Corpus Christi and everywhere." He also found that fellow students were sensitive to all stereotypes, and, "Nobody said anything to me about where I lived, just the way I wouldn't say anything about Spanish Harlem."

Sometimes the initial awe of urban and presumably urbane students fades slowly. Talking with six students in her room at Wes-

leyan in March, Gretchen wondered, "I'd like to know the ratio of city to suburban kids. It seems like there are a lot of city kids here, but I don't know." It turned out, five of the six with her were suburban.

Cultural Clashes

Along with introducing themselves, suburban students are also figuring out who everybody else is and what is socially and politically acceptable on campus. By far the strongest indicators of a conservative campus were the strength of Greek life and conservative religious affiliations. Liberal campuses were mainly nondenominational and many students, even if fraternities and sororities existed, remained unaffiliated. Sometimes the influence of individual departments and schools within universities helped dictate the atmosphere. For example, traditionally conservative business and engineering departments have a different campus effect than more experimental theater and art departments.

A smaller but more immediate barometer is the quantity and essence of graffiti. Use the campus center's restrooms—not the ones in the admissions office—to get the sociopolitical drift.

Political poles on campus aren't always liberal and conservative. At Unity College in Maine, "There are only two types of people at the school," a frosh quipped. "You have your Jerry Garcia Dead Heads and your Shoot 'Em, Kill 'Em Hunters."

Here's how some students learned both to read the signs and follow the unwritten rules at their schools.

Word Power

"We were having this discussion and I used the term JAP [Jewish American Princess]. One of my friends who is Jewish was really offended," recounted an abashed Smith frosh with a liberal background. "I tried to explain that coming from my suburb where there are a lot of spoiled kids, Jewish and not Jewish, a JAP and a WASP are the same thing. They are both white, upper middle class with lots of clothes and a car. I felt really bad that she misunderstood me. I apologized profusely, and haven't used the term since."

Kathy was hurt when a teacher at Stanford objected to her sexist use of the word mankind in a paper. "I didn't mean to be offensive." Like the Smithie, Kathy was chastened by the criticism and adapted to her campus's PC mores, though she wasn't convinced of their validity.

Students reported that even when they just learned to mouth what was politically acceptable at college, they gradually grew to believe the ideas behind the cant. Most didn't realize how indoctrinated they were until they returned home and bristled at unPC behavior and language in their suburbs.

A student from a Wisconsin suburb said, "There were maybe two black kids in my high school, and I usually called them black people. But here [Wisconsin] when I did that I got the dirtiest look. A guy goes, 'I'm an African-American.' I say, 'No, you're an American.' He says, 'I'm from Africa.' I ask, 'Where do your parents live?' He says, 'Chicago.' I say, 'Have you ever lived in Africa?' He says, 'No, I haven't, but that's where my ancestors are from.' I say, 'Then I should call myself a German-American. But I don't because we're all American.'"

Many minority students feel this inclusive attitude is patronizing and denies them pride in their identity. Some majority students learned to get over their hurt and understand how other people wanted to be considered. Even when majority students thought they were being open-minded, they realized they were still setting the rules for relationships between groups.

"I hate that you have to watch every word," said an Amherst frosh from a New York suburb. It felt like two against one in his room—two suburban males (the other from Indiana) versus a Cambodian refugee from a working class Massachusetts city—and he was uncomfortable with the tension. Part was due to cultural differences, but the other part became apparent when he looked around the room and saw all the high-tech equipment, appliances and expensive clothes belonged to the suburbanites.

Peter's friends at Wisconsin were surprised that what once passed for acceptable social banter was now considered offensive. "Fag was a big slang term in high school. [Using] it didn't really mean you were anti-gay, but was just something you said," noted a

buddy. "Now you can use it, but you're more conscious of it, and have to take the consequences."

Damned if You Do

Peter was polite. "From habit, I'd open a door and see if anyone was behind me. If there was, I'd hold it open," he explained. "But two or three times, I held it and a girl came through saying, 'I can do it myself, thank you!' The first time I was really confused and mad. It was after just a month of school, and I was still learning my way around. Then it dawned on me that that was feminism."

Josh was raised as a Christian Scientist but didn't think about religion that much. "Not only didn't I know anybody who was Southern Baptist, I had never known anyone devoutly religious in my whole life," he said. But both his roommates at Annapolis were. They read the bible, went to church and prayed every night. "They take for granted the existence of a god and think I'm going to hell. One turned to me the other night and says, 'Josh, just for argument's sake, pretend there is a god, then you're screwed.'"

Josh didn't feel threatened and chalked up the differences to regionalism since his roommates were from the south and west. "I found that people from the northeast have [what others think are] kind of low morals. People from the midwest and the south seem to have a lot of principles like about premarital sex, which they consider no good."

Later in the semester, Josh grew frustrated. "Some of their conservative reasoning is founded on such stupid ideas you just want to rap some sense into them. My roommate will not date a black girl because he thinks the bible says you shouldn't. But I think he's just inherently racist. I argue with him and the other roommate all the time but have no effect. They think I'm a demon."

Finally he and one roommate reached a standoff. "We agreed I wouldn't say 'goddammit' and he wouldn't say 'nigger' in the room."

Sometimes compromise was impossible. At Lehigh a small group of students who are homosexual asked that the student body support them by wearing jeans on a specific day. According to straight and gay students, fraternities organized a boycott of Gay Jeans Day.

A New York City student was horrified at how many "suburban sheep" followed the frats lead. "My hall was terrible. Signs went up for Jeans On and people switched them to Jeans No. Some signs they changed to Fag Jeans Day or Put On Your Leather Day. It was every stereotype you could think of." He and several other city kids attributed the backlash to the suburban student majority and its provincialism.

Kristen said this isn't quite fair. Gay Jeans Day was poorly organized and many students didn't know about it so they couldn't show their support, she insisted. "I probably would have, but I had a game that day and we had to wear skirts."

But some straight and gay students were afraid to show their colors. In response, a Lehigh sophomore who is homosexual wrote to the school paper, "I have come to the conclusion this fear is often caused by lack of education, not hate." However, he added, "It is incomprehensible to me that members of fraternities and sororities would openly bash their own brothers and sisters. Yes, that's right folks, there are many gay, lesbian and bisexual students in the Greek system. These people are just not openly gay at Lehigh."

Other campuses are more accepting of gay students, and students said understanding ahead of time the campus attitude was important for such minorities if they wanted to feel comfortable. A weekend stay on campus was essential to establish this. However, an African-American student laughed at the suggestion of prejudging campus acceptance during a visit. He felt a certain small eastern college had five black students who the admissions personnel moved around to appear wherever he was on campus.

Stepping into Someone Else's Skin

Like most students from predominantly white suburbs, Amy believed in racial equality but had little experience with people of color. Aware of her limitations but open to learning, Amy grew defensive about being white and resented it. In her UVM class of 2,000, 50 were students of color. She felt their demands outweighed their numbers. "Race is a huge issue here even though the majority is white. Minorities are mad at the school [for their small representation]," Amy noted.

Her resentment stemmed from a course she took called Race and Gender taught by an African-American professor. "At first we thought he was just trying to make us mad and make us think [by his antiwhite statements]. But I think he really means what he says. I feel he's blaming me for everything bad that happened to his people in the past. But I didn't do it," she said. "I know that's very flat out, and if my Race and Gender class heard, they'd kill me, but honestly I didn't come here because it was or wasn't diverse. I'm a white female who came here because I like Vermont and I like the school."

By the year's end, Amy had mellowed somewhat. "A lot of minorities don't come to UVM because there aren't a lot of minorities already there. The state doesn't have that many minorities. It's just one of those things. Minorities have a problem with it. I guess I would too, but I probably wouldn't chose it then," she said.

Some students hadn't seriously thought about political issues before college but assumed that intelligent people, such as those at highly selective colleges, would be open-minded. A Boston College student embraced the diversity she found on campus but was disappointed in the prejudice she encountered as well. "I'm much more open to gays and lesbians because I've actually had contact with people who are," she reported after her first year. "But I've seen so many people who are racist and against Jews and gays. ... You hear a lot of jokes against them. I know you hear that everywhere, but here they sound like they really mean it. At college you're becoming the person you're going to be for life. If you start your future by saying 'that dumb Jew' or something, I think that's crazy."

A friend asked her if she was dating a frequent companion, a black football player. She said no because she wasn't. The friend said, "Oh, good." She asked why. The friend explained, "That would be awful. I would be friends with a black guy, but I would never date one." Later she said, "I was so upset. After, I went out with him. What she said scared me."

Another so-called friend warned her against dancing with a gay person at a party. "What's the big deal?" she said. "He's my friend. I couldn't believe it, that anybody would care."

In the end, she decided coming from conservative suburbs accounted for her peers' bigotry and that she probably will choose to live and raise a family in a more cosmopolitan setting. "If I bring

up my kids in a place like [her home town], I will teach them, as my parents taught me, there is another world out there. I wouldn't want them to have to wait until they got to college to discover it didn't matter whether a person was gay or a black football player, they could still be friends."

Self-Segregators and Integrators

First-year suburban minority students have their own problems on campus. Like Amy at UVM, these students of color said they chose schools for reasons other than race. They wanted to enjoy the social and academic life unselfconsciously, but found they were forced into political roles. Many students from high schools with tiny minority enrollments who went on to similar colleges assumed college would be an extension of high school. They were aware of their differences then but didn't emphasize them in order to get along with the majority, and expected more of the same at college.

But these same students hit campuses where minority and majority students pressured them in conflicting ways. Be proud and belong to us, the minority factions insisted. Blend in with us, explain your differences and let us learn from you, the majority cried. Feeling torn between wanting increased minority identity and yet desiring the fullest all-around college experience, several students said they felt on edge the first few weeks. Some eased the tension by turning their backs on minority groups. Others joined self-segregating groups. Few said they could comfortably do both, but added that it was important to have both types—the blenders and the separatists—on campus.

Kathy described the Stanford situation: "People hang out with people with whom they're comfortable. For some that means anyone, regardless of ethnicity or beliefs. Others need the comfort and solidarity of being with a group of similar people. In an ideal situation, I think all groups should be able to integrate themselves. But in this world it sometimes happens that certain groups get discriminated against, and without the strength of numbers, they can't change their situation. It seems important to have action on both sides—some people integrating and others 'defending' the group."

As an integrator, Kathy added, "Many people would like to classify me with whatever black culture is, because of my race, but I

don't think that really describes me. I don't know if it's possible for me to do, but I try to adopt an 'American ethnicity,' which is a combination of many cultures. … I don't see why people always have to make racial and ethnic distinctions. They lead to stereotypes which lead to prejudice. I prefer to identify myself with my nation, as the rest of the world does, rather than by my race."

However, other African-American frosh used author Terry McMillan's imagery when they referred to joining a black group as finally exhaling after holding their breath through high school. A student who chose exclusively black housing at Cornell said, "It gets tiring explaining yourself to white people all the time. Here I can come home."

As a result of self-segregating, many white students were rebuffed in their efforts to participate in minority friendships and culture. A white Cornell frosh enrolled in an Africa class and felt shunned. She says the whole class and professor laughed at her when she asked what they considered a naive question. She also took a Race and Ethics class that was mainly enrolled in by students of color. "They are resentful of the white people who take their classes because they think we are taking them just for show. How could they think that? They didn't really know me."

Some students of color concede they resent white students in courses about their heritage. Historically, they feel colleges have neglected them, and they want their own people to have first choice in catching up. They also sometimes consider interest by outsiders as a kind of freak show mentality.

At first, Gretchen was amazed at the racial separation at Wesleyan, but came to accept it. "You walk into the cafeteria and see a lot of the black and Latino students sitting together. At first you think it's awful; it's segregated. But you take a longer look and, what's talked about a lot here is most of the black students have gone to high school with mostly white students. This is their first time to be with a whole bunch of black people, and that's great. Is everybody going to get along in the ideal world? I don't know? Is it all right for people to stick together because they have some similarities? Maybe. Besides, just because people eat dinner together doesn't mean they're going to get along and work together."

Politically Inconvenient

Mac didn't think he was prejudiced when he left for Emory. But he noticed he was relieved when an orientation leader, a lesbian, reassured his group that gays weren't likely to hit on unwilling roommates. "What makes you think you're so attractive?" she said. Still, Mac was annoyed that ELGO [Emory Lesbian Gay Organization] staged a noisy rally when he was trying to sleep during an onslaught of exams.

Like most suburban students who were accustomed to being in the majority, Mac objected to minority groups when they interfered with him personally or when they placed him in the bad guy role.

Mac was also surprised by religious cliques. Of his many Jewish friends, he said, "I don't feel oppressed or anything. But I was amazed that a lot of Jewish guys won't go out with a girl unless she's Jewish. I think it's hard enough just to find someone who's nice."

After much agonizing on her part, a young woman who is Jewish agreed to be Mac's girlfriend. She explained her hesitation, "It's really important to me to marry a Jew. I want my kids to be Jewish and I want to have a Jewish family and home. I'm not here to meet a husband or anything, but I think a lot of people do meet their husbands at college. That's why I chose a school with a large Jewish population. ... I know it's my own fault when I get into an interfaith relationship. The guy can never really understand my values because he hasn't experienced them. People can love one another but not be able to live together or raise a family together. The Beatles song goes, 'All you need is love.' Well, I don't think so. There's a lot more to it than that. I only want to get married once so I'm not going to risk an interfaith marriage."

Keenly aware of the high cost of his MIT education, Michael was also annoyed by the effect of political activism. "The largest group is conservative engineers who are generally pretty apolitical," he noted. "But there's a small but vocal group of radical leftists who make their presence known. There was a sexual harassment trial, and the accused professor was acquitted. The next week the radicals marched into his lecture with billboards saying, STOP SEXUAL HARASSMENT. The rest of the student body came down pretty hard on them because they thought class [was] not the time

for this. We're paying a lot of money to go to this school. If you want to express your feelings, do it on your own time."

Scared Apart

"Minorities have been kind of scary for me," admitted a Lehigh frosh. I don't know if I was prejudiced before I left home or not. But if I was, I am more than I was before because—I'm not blaming it on the minorities only—the minorities only associate with themselves. They get together and they're rowdy, noisy. They don't give you the time of day and act like they own the world. I feel if you asked them to keep it down, they'd look at it as a racial thing when it wouldn't be. Work needs to be done on both sides to get some real fraternization. There has to be a way people can hang out together and feel comfortable. I'm not saying I've made an effort, but because they're all together it's tough."

Some students also felt threatened by political groups. "I had a bad experience with a woman's rights group," recalled a Boston college student. "They were demonstrating in the lobby of the [student center], shouting 'help us' and passing out stickers. I thought that was great. But then they started yelling that one in three women would be raped in the next year. I walked in with two friends. I took a sticker and put it on my backpack. As I took it, one of the demonstrators said, 'One of you three is going to be raped.' I didn't like that because she personalized it. [Demonstrating] your ideas, especially on a big campus, is good because it gives people the chance to make their own decisions. But getting too personal influences other people unfairly. We were standing near five men and it made it seem that one of them would rape us. I'm liberal in that I'm open to other people's ideas. But I don't like it when people shove stuff in others' faces."

Different but the Same

On the other hand, a slew of suburban students found the chance to mix it up in a diverse population exciting and liberating. They liked people different from themselves and were delighted when they were liked back.

For example, at Holy Cross, a former Homemaker of America became friends with a Feminist Honcho. And at Lehigh, Kristen discovered, "At first it looks like all the kids are alike. But when you look more closely, they aren't." She developed a close relationship with a black woman and became friendly with Tucker Quayle, even though she at first assumed he'd be aloof and snobby. Incidentally, Quayle was one of the few white students to attend black student events.

Other students, who felt pressure to attend college because their parents had, were interested to meet students who were the first in their families at institutions of higher learning, and found they had their own pressures to make it.

Aside from care packages of Japanese junk food, Michael found his Asian roommate more compatible than many at MIT. "Actually I assumed everyone here was going to be more like me," he claimed, referring to his quiet personality and studiousness. "I expected the difference in backgrounds, but the range of student body personalities was greater than I thought."

Some students felt Asian cliques were more exclusive than any other on campus. While some nonAsians resented this apparent isolation, others were sympathetic to the desire of similar people to hang out together.

In contrast, Michael summed up his diversity experience, "College has made me feel that race relations are good when people are more concerned with what people know and can do than with their appearance. MIT students—stereotype alert—tend to value academic performance and brain power more than appearance."

Yet appearance and other superficial similarities helped to break down barriers for other students.

A Lehigh student from Iowa was wary when she learned her roommate was Indian. But they talked on the phone several times during the summer and discovered they both enjoyed beer parties and tennis. When the Iowan arrived on campus, "I opened the door, and she was already there. She was really cute and was wearing a pink tank top and khaki shorts. I remember thinking, that's the way I dress, too. It made me feel comfortable."

The traditional exchange of summer letters was bollixed up between an Emory student and her assigned roommate. After

much anticipation and worry—"I thought she hated me and she hadn't even met me yet!"—the roommate's letter arrived with a picture. She was black, and the student from Texas felt awkward. "There have been black and Hispanic people in my classes," she explained, "but I've never really been close to a minority before." Her mother also was uncomfortable with the idea of her daughter's roommate. "But we're friends and a lot alike," her daughter found. "We both have brothers three-and-a-half years younger and our parents are still married—which is really weird in today's world. We're also alike in obscure ways, like we both carried a lunch box to high school. Now how many people do that!"

Talking is the way suburban students said they learned the most about others. Gretchen attended a lecture on interracial dating with her RA, a black woman. "After, we talked, and she said, 'I want to date a black man, I'm attracted to black men, I want to have black children and raise them as black children. But if I want to date a black man on this campus, I've got no chance.' She's a junior and says there are only ten black men in her class. Four are gay, two will only date white women and the other two are not nice. So if she wants to date black men, she has to find somebody off this campus or she's alone. I hadn't thought about that before."

Peter reveled in the diversity of his college friends who ranged from a fellow ROTCer with conservative political leanings to a vegetarian pacifist. Of the latter, his best friend at Wisconsin, he said, "I think he is surprised he likes me, but I'm not surprised I like him. He objects to the fact that I eat meat, but doesn't try to force his ideas on me." Peter added, "Another friend is my exact opposite. He's an environmentalist, antinuclear power and antimilitary. But we get along."

The size of the campus and its open atmosphere fosters such friendships, Peter maintained. "I noticed right away people are friendlier here." A friend from home visited and he and Peter walked down the main commercial street near campus. "This guy—maybe he's homeless, maybe not—comes up and starts talking. And I talk to him, too. But my friend was mortified and all nervous. But here you talk to anyone. People don't assume things any way as fast as back home. You don't assume anyone is good or bad just by looking at them."

"Lose your assumptions," agreed Gretchen. She and friends were sitting at lunch after gathering their mail. One young woman read a letter from her father that said he had just bought a vacation home. Another young woman, knowing the parents of the first were divorced, asked, "Oh, does he have a girlfriend to take with him?" Gretchen recalled, "There was this awful silence around the table. Then I think we all realized her father is homosexual."

"All my racial stereotypes were thrown out the window immediately," said a Stanford frosh from a predominantly white New York suburb. Next he had to lose his dumb jock preconception. "You can't even tell who the athletes are," he marveled. "There's a football player who reads Walt Whitman for fun."

The excitement of ideas, even minor ones, also opened up the world to suburban students. An essay on racism shook up Anne's understanding of discrimination. "It gave a whole list of things that white Americans can be assured of. I can go to a pharmacy and know I'll find Band-Aids to match my skin and I will find an appropriate card in a card store."

Anne's classmate from a New York suburb said, "I went to an all-boys Catholic high school and didn't know that much about women. But I was pretty impressed with the women in my classes here. In one class, we read Gloria Steinem's essay, 'If Men Could Menstruate,' and I was surprised. I didn't think women were so similar to us."

Gretchen strained to step outside her cultural viewpoint. "We had read a book in Latin-American History about this Guatemalan woman. We talked about whether or not the women in her community were depressed because their job of staying home seemed repressive to us but is highly respected in their culture. Can we judge their culture by our standards? If not, how can we judge other cultures? If we use their standards are we subject to their prejudices? I had never had that debate before."

The Limits of Liberalism

While many suburban students were stimulated and delighted by the openness and accepting climates on their campuses, they also found the liberalness had bounds.

A suburban student at Vassar reported, "As a heterosexual I sometimes feel there's a lot of prejudice against me." Then she laughed, "Sometimes I want to shout, I'm heterosexual and that's OK too!"

Peter said Wisconsin students aren't quite as open as they think. "The whole ROTC-bad-guy image kind of sucks," he admitted. "People who don't like me go in with the idea that I'm a warmonger, and I'm not." Still, Peter enjoyed testing his ideas and values against the opposition.

"It wasn't all diversity university," Gretchen said of Wesleyan, noting discrimination against fraternity types, especially football players. In fact, for an anthropology paper on different cultures, a young woman chose to study a member of a jock frat house. One football recruit from a Massachusetts suburb remarked, "Things are kind of upside down. In high school, I was a hero, but here I'm sort of looked down on."

Gretchen added, "I knew this was a liberal school, and I went not so much with an open mind, but with the idea that more liberal ideas would be pumped into me." And that's what she found.

PC TIPS

1. Many students take sociopolitical issues seriously. You can believe what you like at college but be prepared to back up your opinions with information.

2. Prejudice against suburban students and the stereotype of rich, white, spoiled brats persists. Students suggested keeping a low profile and being sensitive to what others might misinterpret as snobbery. Some suburban students found that, after scratching the surface of urbanity, many students had similar backgrounds to theirs.

3. Usual indicators of a sociopolitically conservative campus are a strong Greek life and conservative religious affiliations. In addition, traditionally conservative departments or schools within a university such as business or engineering influence campus climate. On the other hand, liberal campuses were mainly nondenominational and many students, even if fraternities and sororities existed, remained unaffiliated. At these institutions, customarily experimental departments such as theater and art affected the atmosphere.

4. An immediate method of judging what's PC on campus is reading graffiti in the campus center or dorm restrooms. Beware: the admissions office restroom is not representative of the school. Also, read the student paper to find out the hot campus issues.

5. Watch what you say and do. Innocent slang or behavior at your high school or home may be taken as offensive slurs or insulting acts at college.

6. Most likely, your beliefs and assumptions will be challenged. First year is a good time for suspending beliefs and losing assumptions if you are learning about people and ideas you

hadn't considered before. Since education is a process and you are starting out, don't be afraid to change or just be uncertain about what you think. Good liberal arts schools teach there is no one right answer.

7. Be prepared to act on strongly held beliefs. Marches, boycotts and sit-ins, political weapons of the '60's and '70's, are making a comeback.

8. On most campuses, a diverse society ceases to be theory and is reality. Getting along in such a multicultural community is more difficult than suburban students suspected. Many found themselves annoyed, inconvenienced and scared by political activities.

9. Majority students have trouble understanding and accepting minority students on their own terms. Eager to make new friends, many suburban students felt excluded and misunderstood by minorities.

10. Minority students often felt more like objects of interest than people on some campuses. Many found the companionship of others like themselves a welcome relief.

11. Some minority students said their clannishness was overstated. "You notice tables of all black or Asian kids, but you don't raise an eyebrow at all white tables," a student noted.

12. Minority students reported pressure to either blend in with the majority or stake out a separate place with other members of their minority. Few said they could belong to both worlds.

13. Arm yourself with information to fight prejudice. For example, the Anti-Defamation League supplies factual brochures countering false assertions about the Jews' role in the slave trade.

14. On the other hand, theoretically, college is the ideal place for people of diverse political, economic and cultural backgrounds but equal intelligence to meet and become friends. This does happen.

PART

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Home Fires

CHAPTER

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Bad News from Home

Often, just when college starts feeling like home, something happens at your original home that makes you feel that you don't belong in this new place or at least divides your loyalties.

Usually what happens is bad news: divorce, sibling struggles, job loss, sickness. Because of the suburban white-picket-fence-perfect image, college personnel and other students may be unaware of these less than idyllic home conditions and the strains they create. But a Stanford RA realized that one suburban student called home every night to check on an alcoholic parent and many students living with divorced moms worried about money. "The problem is," the advisor noted, "behind these placid-looking communities are secret suburban lives."

Suburban students are usually discreet about their secret lives. The academically and emotionally successful ones—those who can break away and are admitted to good schools—often felt they were the ones who best kept the family secrets or who held the family together. Sometimes they exaggerated their power, so when they heard about hard times at home, they felt especially guilty about not being there.

A student from a New Jersey suburb cried before she left home. "I worry who's going to take care of my family. I'm the oldest and always felt in charge of my brother and sister. I worry about who's going to get my brother ready for his first dance and who's going to help when they're fighting with my mom. I feel it should be me," she explained.

Anne, dubbed Peacemaker by her family, described an upsetting call, "My mom said you totally have to come home because I'm overwhelmed being in a household of men—my father and two brothers. She says she misses the girls [Anne's older sister is away at college too] so much, she doesn't know what to do. She told me my little brother said, 'Mommy, why are you having sad eyes?' I felt so bad and frustrated."

Some parents counter that students take their comments too seriously. College students, feeling less certain of themselves away from home, may overreact to light-hearted descriptions of home events. Wanting to remind students that they are loved and unforgotten, parents say, "We miss you." Students may interpret this as "Come home." On the other hand, students may transfer their own homesickness to their parents.

Away from home, some students magnify preexisting family troubles. "I don't get any pressure from home, but I'm really concerned about my parents having enough money," said a student who lived with his separated mom in an affluent Westchester County suburb. "I've got one brother in college at the same time as me and another one coming up. I know it's going to be a problem, but my mom says don't worry. Also, I worry that my mom's really lonely."

Parents may actually report unsettling developments. For example: "My mom tells me my dad is going through a tight time at work. He was planning to talk to his boss and threaten, 'Either you give me another position or I'm out of here.' I thought about all our expenses—my sister's in college too, my brother in prep school. I was like, He can't say that. I was also, Mom, why'd you tell me that? It totally stressed me out."

Even good news can be bad at college. A Holy Cross frosh worried when he found out his dad got a promotion. "Immediately the focus was on me," he thought. "Would I keep my scholarship? Would my loans increase? Would the whole raise be eaten up by more tuition? It made me tense, and I felt I was sort of bringing down the whole family's excitement."

The problem is any news of change can be disconcerting. College students' new lives are in flux and they may want their old worlds to compensate by standing still. When asked to describe home life at a given time and day after they had left for college, sub-

urban students were certain the ordinary activities—watching TV, reading, doing homework, making dinner—would continue in the old ways. "I am happy to be home because I was away so long," said Peter on his first visit after four months at school. "It's just that I know what to expect here. I know home is going to be there the way I remembered."

All the above news is common enough that it can be understood by a friend at college. Talking to an empathetic person helps alleviate feeling helpless and lonely away from home. Sometimes, if distances aren't too great, going home for a weekend helps. Then students can see for themselves that the family can exist without them. In contrast, some students attending distant schools said just knowing they could have gone home easily might have made hearing bad news easier, even if they hadn't gone.

In fact, home reality is often less romantic than students remember, even after a few weeks at school. Kennell Jackson Jr., Stanford associate history professor and a dorm faculty resident for 15 years, noted of suburban students, "A lot is going on here that isn't going on at home. In the beginning it's a jolt, and they're scared. They think everybody's more talented, and the system seems relentless and immutable. They idealize home. They complain about dorm food and compare it unfavorably to home meals. But they forget that actually no one cooks at home anymore, and there are conflicts at home."

Serious Bad News

Weston students heard particularly tragic news from home. Although it was more dramatic than what most students receive at school, their feelings and how they handled them are models of lesser experiences.

About a month into the college year a former Weston classmate jumped from the rear car of a Brooklyn subway and was killed by an oncoming train. Toxicology reports showed the young man had been smoking marijuana and drinking. He died two days before his 18th birthday.

For most Weston students, Todd (not his real name) was a beloved burnout. He had attended Weston schools for part of his

school career, but was currently enrolled in his second year at a military academy. He had been arrested three times for alcohol-related charges. Wild but basically a good guy and very smart, is the way most students described him. Many had predicted a tragic end for him but were still shocked when it happened.

The news came late at night for most students and that added to the disquieting experience. Kristen was asleep when a fellow Westonite at Lehigh phoned. "I was kind of out of it and couldn't remember him at first," she recalled. "Since I didn't go home for the funeral, it felt so distant, like it didn't happen. But, in a way, I'm glad I didn't go back because I heard horrible things about the service."

The death reminded Kristen of what she wanted to escape. "In Weston, they have a hard time telling it how it is. There are a lot of problems just below the surface. But people try to cover them up so when something like this happens it's like it isn't Weston's problem."

Need for Old Friends

Tim called Anne. "I heard his voice all low and thought, oh my gosh. I wanted to talk to someone in person, so I went down to some friends' room. It was hard because they didn't know him and didn't understand how it could affect me so even if I wasn't good friends with him. They didn't understand how small Weston is and how everybody knows everybody. But, in a way, it was good for me because I had to explain things to them that I was trying to understand myself."

A Cornell student reported she sought out several other Weston students on campus and, "basically we stared at walls that night. Other people at school didn't really understand. I just wanted to be with my old friends. Most of them came home for the funeral, and I did too." She was surprised at some people who attended but decided many came home to say good-bye to part of childhood, a part that had to end so they might succeed in a more responsible life at college. For others, their strong emotions at the funeral were further proof that ties to college friends would never be as binding as high school friendships.

"I'm sorry I didn't come home for the funeral," Gretchen said. She heard that Todd's best friends, some of whom lived as much on the edge as he did, spoke sincerely about reforming. "Maybe this time, since there have been so many deaths in a row [three other Weston teen alcohol-related deaths in two years], what they said may have some real effect."

Life Lesson

Another student regretted not showing up for the funeral. "He and I were never close. But I liked him and I think he liked me. He always said, 'You're a good kid, and I'm glad to see you're doing so well,'" said the Lehigh student who, unlike Todd, focused on conventional success during high school. "The day of the funeral was when I started to see I had a problem," he reflected. "I had an exam, and I chose to stay and take it rather than talk to the professor and get it changed. I said to myself, 'Wow, kid, you are really absorbed in your own life.'" He vowed to change.

It Could Have Been Me

Josh came home for the funeral. "Todd was a very close friend, probably my best friend," he explained. "I heard about it the day before taking three major exams. A friend called the Academy, and they sent a lieutenant to my room with the message. It really floored me. I knew something was going to get to him eventually, but I didn't think it would be now."

At first Josh was so busy with details he didn't have time to be upset. "All I could think of was getting out and going to the funeral on Friday. But it was exam week and I had those three tests on Wednesday. Besides, the policy covers leave for family funerals but not for friends'. The commissioned officer in charge broke out all these sheets that listed my grades, but it seemed uncertain," he recalled.

The next morning Josh got the OK. Then he had to get to a travel agent, buy a ticket and find a ride to the train. He couldn't talk to his parents because they were in Japan. He tried his friend's house but the line was busy. Finally, he reached his girlfriend. There at a public phone in the middle of the Academy, he burst into tears.

Josh was haunted by the memory of Todd's saying he didn't want to turn 18. Being 18 meant becoming a responsible adult, and Todd dreaded that. At the funeral, Josh spoke of how close his friend was to finally pulling himself together and how everyone was rooting for him.

At the wake, Josh saw himself as symbolically different from his high school buddies' who had belonged to the infamous VDT, Varsity Drinking Team. "I'm in this bright white uniform, and everyone else is in suits. They were kind of taken aback," he said, acknowledging that hanging out with the VDT but not getting into trouble when they did had been a safe way for him to be bad.

"I had a bunch of kids over after the funeral. My parents weren't home, and it was like a regular party. They're all talking about colleges and parties. I had some pictures of plebe summer. They were shocked by the daily schedule. I looked like a concentration camp victim in my ID card. Most of them couldn't understand it. I said I was going from relative freedom to a prison, the opposite of what they were doing. When they asked me why I did it, I explained about the opportunities after graduation and what I can do with my life. Only one girl, whose brother had enlisted, kept saying how honorable it was. That made me happy."

Josh returned to the Naval Academy keenly aware of once hanging out with "bad boys" in high school but not really being one of them. His academic prowess, discipline and career goals separated him, and perhaps saved him from his friend's end. The death helped him rededicate himself to a grueling routine. He aced his exams and earned a 3.45 first term.

BAD NEWS TIPS

The news may not be as bad as you think:

1. Your main job now is going to college. Probably your family acknowledges and supports that so get on with it.
2. You can love your family and your college at the same time.
3. News from home is somewhat dated by the time you hear it, and you can't do much about it.
4. Most families continue fairly well without any one member for a time. In fact, another member may have a chance to develop and take on some of your old role. No, you're not being replaced.
5. Home problems or their roots most likely existed long before you left for school. Your leaving didn't create them. You couldn't cure them before and you can't now.
6. Don't overreact to innocent conversations. "Miss you" doesn't mean "drop out."
7. Everybody gets a little (and sometimes a lot) homesick. Don't ascribe your own feelings to the folks at home.
8. There's no place like home, but home is not necessarily idyllic.

But sometimes the news really is bad:

1. Your first obligation now is to yourself. As an Emory student said, "I love my parents, but this time is for me."
2. Come home for a weekend, if you feel you must. But know that you are essentially a visitor right now.

3. Don't use bad news as an excuse to stop studying, going to classes or having fun. On the other hand, don't overload yourself or have unfair expectations during tough times.
4. Talk. Find a friend at school or phone a home friend. Writing a letter (even if you don't mail it) or sending E-mail is a less expensive way of sharing and figuring out your feelings.

CHAPTER

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Visitors to and from a Small Planet

College students dream of the clean sheets, good food and private bathroom that are home. Many schools have a long weekend break in October, and frosh who live nearby often come home for the first time then. They may bring along new friends, or arrive with only their dirty laundry and new ideas. Many other students don't make it home until Thanksgiving. Still others, who attend distant schools, first return at Christmas. That four-week or four-month absence feels like an eon, and the distance from school to home—even if it's only an hour—seems like travel from outer space to Earth or the other way around.

The First Time

Travel from a city school back to the suburbs can be a jolt. As Tim's bus pulled out of Boston, passing the Hard Rock Cafe, he was hit by the easy access to glamorous spots he was leaving.

At home he observed, "It's really weird. In the movies you see the little kid come back from the city to the nothing little town. I never thought of Weston as that town. But when I came back, I thought, Whoa, I don't believe it, this is it."

First visits home were usually hurried. In less than 48 hours students squeezed in a few meals, laundry, maybe a haircut or doctor's appointment and brief contact with parents, siblings and old

friends. Most students agreed that just seeing home and enjoying the physical comforts was beneficial, but said the speed made it seem unreal.

"The first morning I woke up and thought, Should I go downstairs or should I wait for everyone else to get up," Kristen said of her first visit. "I felt like a guest. Then I thought, Hey, this my house. I think Thanksgiving will be better. It'll be longer, and I'll be with my brother." Having old friends home would help, too, she added.

A UVM student home early in October said, "My room is sort of empty so I feel like I don't live here anymore. It doesn't feel like it's my town at all. Last night I was out with a bunch of my friends and they were saying it's really weird because now we just vacation here. Once we've gone to college it's like we don't really live here anymore.

"I feel so much older than all the high schoolers I saw yesterday. I went to the football game and felt so different. My parents aren't on me in the same way yet. If I stayed longer they'd get back to the whole high school way of treating me, I think."

Later: So Much the Same, So Much Different

Students returning home a second time later in the semester, mostly at Thanksgiving, experienced a less dreamlike visit. By that time, most students said academic and social pressures were at such peaks that they welcomed the respite and, above all, craved sleep in a quiet place. In retrospect, the few students not returning, regretted they hadn't. Spending Thanksgiving with friends or relatives just wasn't the same escape.

Thanksgiving was Michael's first time home. He arrived Wednesday night and stayed around the house doing homework, catching up on family news, sleeping and eating until Saturday. He needed time to decompress, and the ride home with his dad was part of that reentry process. "It was an unwinding time. Just the geographical distance took a large load of stress off my shoulders. I talked to my father the whole way home, which was somewhat unusual."

The only edgy note was Michael felt his dad was more interested in MIT's social scene than in its academics. This difference between them had always existed, but the ride was a reminder. "All the little annoying family habits are still there," noted Michael.

Amy didn't return for the traditional high school homecoming weekend. "It's the time for college kids to come home and feel important," she scoffed. "They go to the football game, and everybody says, 'Look who's here.' I liked high school when I was there, but I don't have this feeling where I have to go back and see all these people. A lot of people are still holding onto high school memories. I'm trying to break off and move on."

But Amy did come home for her brother's 21st-birthday celebration and then again at Thanksgiving and Christmas. Each time just getting there was a deal. Sometimes she followed a labyrinth of bus and train travel. Other times she made painstaking arrangements with a fellow student for a ride only to have him keep her waiting for hours while he packed, took a skiing break and even shopped for Christmas presents.

The angst of getting home was accompanied by more tension once she arrived. "Thanksgiving was emotional," Amy recalled. "My mom wanted everything to be perfect. My sister was having problems because it was the first time my brother and I had been home. She felt left out because we were getting so much attention. She was always mad at me, yelling at me. And, on the other side, was my mom's wanting this picture perfect Thanksgiving dinner."

Others students found they had idealized family life and traditional events and were disappointed by reality. Small changes—opening holiday gifts at a different time, siblings taking over former bedrooms—were disconcerting.

"Everything looks about the same," Mac noted at Thanksgiving, "and that was kind of depressing. I remembered all the reasons I was so eager to go off to college and get away from here."

Mac added, "I realized how sheltered everything here is. You read about the big football player [in the local paper], and that was kind of like me in cross-country, but someplace bigger he would be nothing. I see now what a big fish in a little pond you are here."

Bumping against the town's limitations, Mac and his buddies found themselves at the local diner one night. "I couldn't believe it," he said. "We hated going here when we were in high school, but that's all we could find to do."

Back in their old beds and surrounded by childhood objects, several students felt caught in a time warp and didn't know how to behave. New college ways and old home rules seemed to conflict.

"Even though my parents know I come back to the dorm at 2 a.m., I didn't think I could do that at home," a student said at Thanksgiving. "They were really trying, especially my mom, not to say anything to me. But I could tell they still cared, so I didn't come home too late and came in to let them know I was safe."

Sometimes values clashed too. A student from Massachusetts noted, "In my town everyone is the same; we don't have many minorities at all. I think it was good for me to come to Wesleyan because of the diversity. But sometimes I feel it's so diverse and PC that I know when I get out into the real world it's not going to be like that. Of course, where I come from isn't the real world either. When I go home, it's so different that I don't know which one is right."

The Long, Long Winter Break

At some schools such as the universities of Massachusetts and Delaware, winter break can span two months and complete additional academic sessions are offered during the general recess. More commonly, the break lasts about a month. This extended period allows students time to have fun, grow bored, enjoy and be annoyed by their families, and more time to reflect on home and school.

Kathy's plane ride from California provided welcome transition time. Returning for the first time at Christmas, she said, "Luckily, no one was sitting next to me. I didn't want to talk to anyone I didn't know. I was thinking: This is the longest time I've been by myself for months."

Kathy's dad met her at the airport, and she felt awkward with him. "I'm not often alone with him," she recalled. "It felt tense."

Finally they arrived home, and her mom hugged her and had prepared a requested meal, stuffed shells. Then Kathy started to feel comfortable. Little things, Kathy and others said, like favorite foods are reassuring and ease reentry.

But some familiar things were discomfiting. Kathy was invited to a surprise party for Peter. On arriving, she found, "I kind of felt like an outsider. I hated that it was just the way it always was in high school—little separate groups. At school [Stanford], I'd be mingling and talking to everyone. If I were to even try that around here, it wouldn't work. If these people changed in college, then they

came back and fell into their old ways. I ended up thinking: Why is this such a set scene? I don't miss this."

As arduous as Naval Academy life is, Josh was itching to return at the end of Christmas vacation. "I had almost forgotten how boring home could be," he said. "Outside of campus, you really have to work to find something to do. When you're in high school, if you call enough people, you can finally find something to do. But now you can't call enough people. There's just nothing going on. I feel a little trapped in the house and in town. At school, there are so many things you have to do that in a way it frees you.

"But when I get back, I'm going to be, What was I thinking? I mean, I chose it [the Academy], but day to day I'd rather not do it."

Along with easily accessible activities from rock concerts to weightlifting, students noticed the other thing missing in suburban life was instant friends. Growing up with a best friend two miles away, a frosh relished finding college friends right outside her door. "At home, it's so hard," she said. "You have to make all these calls and arrangements. Here, people are just here. It's no big deal."

Time to Think—Maybe Too Much

With time on their hands and perhaps parents reminding them of college's cost, many students started to reevaluate their fall experience.

"I've got a new approach," Gretchen said. "I'm going to study a lot more and not in my room. After realizing that [cost] $11,000, I thought that wasn't $11,000 worth of work." Vowing to work harder, she added: "I think the idea of taking a light load the first semester, which I did, because of all the adjustments is probably good. Just living away from home and just generally new kinds of experiences are an adjustment even if they're not major. But second semester, you can really get down to it."

Like Gretchen, some frosh determined to put in more effort to get their money's worth. Some also decided to demand more from the schools, and vowed to talk to professors and wangle their way into hard to get into classes.

Several took belt-tightening measures such as not purchasing expensive textbooks but using them in the library. (Beware: Faculty members warn against this. They said nothing beats owning

and underlining your own books.) Many students changed meal plans, most opting for ones that excluded breakfasts, which they had paid for but missed. Some, like Peter, planned to be more prudent in spending money for food. Two students, who had approached checking accounts intuitively, learned to balance checkbooks during vacation.

Sometimes rethinking school wasn't a matter of money or books. Gretchen was typical of those who considered transferring to another school. She started thinking about it in October and glanced at other college catalogs. Other students, who were more serious about transferring, investigated choices with their high school guidance offices at Thanksgiving and sent away for applications.

For most, the transferring urge remained a vague yen. Students at small schools suspected they might find more variety at larger institutions. Big school students missed the personal touch of smaller places. Students longed for schools in different climates. Those at specialized schools, like Tim at Emerson and Michael at MIT, thought they might have preferred a more generalized education. Liberal arts students, like Gretchen at Wesleyan and Amy at UVM, worried that they might be unprepared for the job market. One student said, "This place is good, but someplace else might be better." In other words, no college was ideal and every choice was a compromise.

But if students weren't wildly unhappy, they procrastinated in applying to other schools. So by the end of December vacation, most students had come to terms with not transferring. Practical problems often dissuaded them. For example, Gretchen figured out that it was too late to apply to another school for sophomore year. Then, since she wanted to study abroad junior year, she would spend only her senior year on a new campus.

Patterns

From first visit to winter break, many students report a progression of loosening bonds to home and old friends. During the first visit, maybe in October, they saw lots of old friends. Then, by Thanksgiving, they contacted only a few. For the longer Christmas

vacation, they spent most of their time calling or visiting new college friends.

A Lehigh student from Iowa was typical. "The week before Thanksgiving I was really, really homesick. I just wanted the familiarity of my house. I didn't miss my high school friends as much as I thought I would because I got close to a lot of people up here. But I missed my sisters and just being loved and belonging to my family," she explained.

"I got home early Thursday morning at 1 a.m., and saw my high school friends on Friday night. They seemed to be competing in stories about wild parties, new friends and how hard the work was. I kept quiet because a lot of them go to state schools, and I know their schools are more like an extension of high school. They have a community of friends already, and I don't think their new experiences are that different from before."

She was turned off by all the boasting and appreciated her friends at college in contrast. "I realized a lot of the guys I had known were conceited. I thought: I can't believe these are the guys I hung out with."

The next time home: "At Christmas, my friends wanted me to go out all the time, but I didn't want to. I just wanted to stay home and relax. I went out a few times, and it was fun to bond with my old friends again. But there's so much that's hard to relate to now."

During the December visit, she experienced another change. "I feel like a visitor in my own house," she noted. "I feel like I'm never really going to live there again. It's kind of sad but good, too. It's sad because I miss the energy of my family, but good because I'm on my way to my own life. I've wanted to be doctor for a long time, and it's getting more exciting as I get closer."

Unlike most students in this book, Gretchen and Anne felt no growing apart from old friends. "There was no awkwardness," Gretchen explained, "because we had kept in such close touch." They had written to each other every day and mailed the composite letters once a week.

Gretchen said not being the first returning college student in a family helped also. Her older siblings and Anne's prepared their families and themselves for homecoming. Gretchen was also the only student not bored with the long December break. "It was wonderful to read a book without underlining," she sighed.

A Note to Parents

The phone rings at 1 a.m.; the front door slams at 3 a.m.; a week's food supply is gone in an hour; laundry, laundry everywhere; every room is tempest tossed. In other words, the kids are home from college.

As much as parents look forward to their progeny's return, the actuality is hard to handle. One Cornell mom quipped, "It's good to see them come and it's good to see them go."

Along with conflicts over sleep, meals, housekeeping and home rules versus college freedom, parents said the most painful part of vacations was watching their smart, expensively educated children do nothing. A Putnam Valley (NY) dad spoke for many parents saying, "Next year will be different," meaning his daughter would have a job.

Flip Side Visits

Just as students traipse back home for holidays, frosh parents make the traditional journey to campuses for Parents Weekend. Usually held in mid October, PWs aim to satisfy consumers of an expensive product—those folks who are forking over up to $28,000 a year for an education.

Like a grown-up version of summer camp visiting days, schools attempt to give parents a flavor of their children's academic and social lives and constructive images to combat vague uncertainties they conjure up at home. So parents tour impressive libraries, gyms and student centers. They talk to reassuring administrators and professors. They may attend classes and sports events. Usually an official on-campus meal (probably a step up from daily campus fare) or unofficial meal off campus is another prescribed activity. Although some thought is given to students' needs or desires to see their parents, schools mainly hope that parents will leave campuses satisfied that their children are thriving and with goodwill toward the institutions. Parents may even be moved to donate to school coffers on top of tuition.

That's the good part of Parents Weekend. But there are drawbacks as well. As UVM's Director of Residential Life Jill Carnaghi pointed out, even the name is a slight misnomer at schools where

large portions of the student body have divorced parents. Aware of this situation, some colleges like Wheaton run separate weekends for moms and dads. The pressure of handling divorced parents who visit together can feel like a juggling act, some students said.

On a practical level, managing housing and meals for hordes of additional people, especially on campuses in small towns surrounded by open countryside, can be overwhelming. Many such schools, like Colgate, advise parents to make weekend reservations as soon as students are admitted and provide hotel/motel and restaurant information for a 50-mile radius. Facilities fill up early, and last minute panic is common. Parents described staying 45 minutes from campus, spending most of the weekend in the car.

The tradition of parents taking students and their friends out to dinner can be unnerving. If reservations are required long in advance (more than a day), students may be uncertain who will be a friend at that point, and others may hope to be included in other family groups at the last minute. Distant restaurants and inconvenient reservations may interfere with activities planned on campus. "The way I see it," one dad quipped, "we leave the football game at half time, change clothes in the car, eat dinner at 3:30, be back for the play at 7, drive to the motel at midnight and get up at 6 to get to the parents breakfast."

The worst part of the weekend, most students agreed, was showing parents around the campus. Some students imagined the campus and student body through their parents' eyes. They worried how parents would view X-rated posters, telltale beer bottles, wads of dirty laundry or roommates with multiple earrings. They were equally concerned how other students would judge their parents.

Students often felt self conscious as tour guides of places where they were still newcomers. Trying to please their parents, they wanted to appear confident and popular, even if they didn't feel that way.

And school life goes on. As a New Jersey student recalled, "I kind of wanted to go to the library for a few hours and I couldn't. I wasn't used to having to fit my schedule around other people—my mom, stepmother and half-sister. I was really excited about their coming, but when they got here, it was tense."

Wanting to see parents for a short time only was a common desire. "Everything was relatively nice, but while you were walking

around showing your parents things you had the feeling there were better things going on that you were missing out on," said a student from Long Island.

Other suburban students, whose parents were sophisticated travelers, worried there wasn't enough to keep them busy on campus. Some students, who didn't want to discuss their unsettled feelings about college, were especially concerned about filling up time without a lot of emotion-probing talk.

Most visiting parents didn't intend to burden their children. Some tried to allow time out, sometimes going to the library or museum, visiting with friends or shopping without their children. Some students appreciated this free time, but others said they just worried about what their parents were doing anyway.

On the other hand, some students really enjoyed the weekend. Those who hadn't seen parents in six weeks or so welcomed the chance to catch up. They said it was hard to explain what was going on in phone calls, letters and E-mail. For example, they wanted their parents to hear how hard school was from administrators, to see the beauties of campus, to meet friends along with impossible people. Other students just wanted parents to see they were alive, well and even remembered to brush their teeth.

A Pennsylvania student said Parents Weekend was just the way she had pictured it. "It was nice to bring your family here. Everyone, including people who didn't have family come in, was having picnics and eating together. I'm close to my family and I wanted them here."

Parents and students who fall between the weekend haters and lovers sometimes opt for a visit at a less hectic time, usually later in the semester when students are surer of themselves and their campuses.

One student mentioned that, although she and her parents had agreed on a different visit time and she was enjoying her unpressured weekend while her friends were harried, when Saturday night dinner arrived she missed her parents.

Pressured, artificial, inconvenient though it sometimes is, some parents and students said it was one of those rites of passage you have to experience. As a Wesleyan student said, "It's great and it's awful."

VISITING TIPS

Going home:

1. You are returning to a place and people who are the same and different. What annoyed you before will still bother you. Some of what you remembered as ideal may be less than perfect.
2. You may feel caught in a twilight zone between belonging and visiting. You may also feel confused about your identity. Are you the high school kid who once slept in your bed or the college student who has a new room and new life? Are you both?
3. The number of appropriate home visits depends, but, especially in the beginning, you will want to establish yourself on campus before returning home.
4. Respect home rules. Your family and community's values and mores may seem odd to you now, but while you are there try to adapt. Help parents grow up by adjusting to home life. You were their child for 18 years. It may take them more than six weeks to accept you as an independent adult.
5. Use the trip home to unwind. Talking to a parent on the way may be your first adult conversation and may feel awkward.
6. Allow time to just veg out—sleep, eat, watch TV, pet the dog. Be realistic about the amount of homework you can accomplish. Saving a paper to write during a holiday may not work out.
7. Expect some loosening of home and old friend ties as visits progress.
8. December vacation is notoriously long. Students were bored and missed the immediate access to friends and activities. Try to arrange for a job, trip or something constructive or you will

drive yourself and your family crazy. Some schools offer courses on campus during break so students may make up credits or get ahead in requirements at this time. A few schools arrange internships for students either on or near campus or in their hometowns.

9. Hitching rides with friends from school can be anxiety producing. Sometimes it's easier to take a bus even if it goes by way of Albania.

10. If you visit your old high school, beware: the school, teachers and students may have shrunk.

11. Not going home for Thanksgiving may be a false economy. Sign up early for super-saver fares or use frequent flyer mileage.

When home comes to you:

1. Talk to parents and decide if the official visiting time is really the one you both want.

2. Expect to feel somewhat torn between your interest in them and other campus activities.

3. Discuss honestly what each of you would like to do.

4. Include a friend without visitors in some of your activities.

5. Don't expect to be or feel like the campus's biggest expert.

PART

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The School Calendar and Its Effects

CHAPTER

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It's a Beach: September to December

Even at landlocked colleges in Indiana, college students reported they felt like pebbles on a beach, constantly tossed about by tides of events and activities.

Most schools share certain conventional events such as midterms and spring flings, although the dates and nature of the events depend on the semester arrangement and the school's style. For example, Princeton's final exams occur after Christmas break so vacation is not entirely carefree. On some campuses National Coming Out of the Closet Day is a big Halloween-type celebration for straights and gays, while it goes almost unnoticed at other schools.

Just as every pebble on the beach is different, individual students judged their own high and low water marks on the calendar. So while some found the beginnings of both semesters high points, others declared them nadirs. Just before Thanksgiving and Valentine's Day were pretty bad for most students, but, again, not for all. In general, those who were most disappointed at particular points had the greatest expectations for those periods.

Here are some typical campus calendar occurrences and how suburban students experienced them.

In the Beginning: High Hopes

At last, Michael had hoped, a school where he would be surrounded by other serious students, work to his limits and achieve

something real. But after a few weeks, he was disappointed. "I had an image of MIT as a place where they chained you to your desk and you worked all the time. I'm not sorry that's not true. But I also thought as soon as you walked in they gave you plans for a nuclear accelerator in one hand and all of quantum mechanics in the other, and you had to learn them by Tuesday to build a space ship on Wednesday." That didn't happen.

As for mixing it up with brilliant minds, Michael joked, "I haven't noticed that anyone's a genius yet. I wouldn't eliminate the possibility, but I don't think that's the kind of thing that shows."

On the social level, Amy felt as letdown as Michael did about academics. She anticipated close friends immediately, but didn't find them. High hopes were part of the problem, Amy said after a month at UVM. "I thought I was prepared [for college] because I have an older brother. I kind of knew what happens. I didn't think I went with a set of expectations, but I guess I did. Like about making all these friends the first minute. You go with expectations and set yourself up for disappointments."

A Smith frosh acknowledged the power of her preconceptions: "I'm sort of romantic. I have all these visions of what things are supposed to be like. Like what your first date with the person you're going to fall in love with will be like, and what college is supposed to be like. It's nice when it fits, which is rarely."

Smith didn't, and she left in December. Now, she recognizes that her psychological problems, not the college itself, prevented her from adjusting to frosh life.

Mac had romantic visions too. "I had it so built up in my head that I was going to get to college and, bam, there was going to be all this fun. Not that it's not fun, and I have been enjoying myself since the second month. But I shouldn't have expected nirvana right away."

A Georgetown student concurred. "College was nothing like what I thought it would be. I saw a lot of TV and movies like "Revenge of the Nerds" about it, but I never did overnights, which I should have to get a true feel of the school. Another way I formed my expectations was from people who came back and talked about

all their friends and all the wild things. But most of that is just lies. They say it because that's what they're expected to say."

He continued, "I thought I'd go to school and click right in with everything. I figured since I did well in high school, I'd do just as well in college. But you have to do work at a different level. I had good friends in high school, so I thought I'd have them in college, too. In the beginning, I tried to find people who would be like my friends from home, which is the wrong thing to do." Friends were a particular issue for him because his best friend had died in a car accident the summer before college and because he was leaving a serious high school girlfriend.

He dropped out of Georgetown and began UVM the following September with a new attitude. "No school would have been right for me last year because I was basically unhappy and not ready for college," he said in retrospect. "I knew it at the time, but thought most kids felt that way and they did it anyway."

Now he advised: "I'd say have no expectations, but you can't really do that. Other than that, just be yourself. I see a lot of kids trying to be really crunchy or something else that really isn't them." The problem with faking it, he explained, is that students can't keep up their acts in such an intimate setting, and they miss out on finding others who are like their true selves.

After the Storm

Right after the whirlwind activities of orientation and the first week of classes, some students felt an uneasy stillness. Many schools provide official frosh socials and entertainment the weekend following orientation, so the second weekend may be the first time frosh haven't been scheduled for more than two weeks. Some find their own activities, some sleep and some mope.

Some of the letdown is the contrast, noted an Emory student. He came to school expecting "all this big group bonding and big school sponsored activities." And he got it the first week "when we had what I thought was the ultimate college thing—mud sliding." After that, it was all downhill for him.

For her first freely chosen activity, an Emory frosh went to a fraternity party. "Freshmen guys aren't allowed to go to the houses

because rush is on and that's called dirty rush. But all the freshmen girls—no matter who—are invited to be checked out. I was going with a group and was really excited. I thought it would be cool. I went to the first house and hated it. So I went on to the next, and before I even walked in, someone spit vodka on me. But I went in anyway. It was so crowded, packed. There's smoke everywhere and people are drinking everywhere. People are screaming and pushing you around. I wanted to leave but didn't want to go alone. I was afraid because, by this time, it was dark and I didn't know the campus that well. I stayed for awhile, but finally said to myself, 'I do not like this. I'm going.'"

About that same time a Holy Cross student said, "I was calling my girlfriend from home, sounding depressed and taking it out on her. The problem was the social scene. One Friday night my entire hall went out to bars, except for the kid across the hall who was doing his work or had his girlfriend over. My friends are out. I don't like the bar scene. What else can I do?"

Anne noticed that her friends who were romantically involved with people not on campus suffered during this period. "Leslie and Karen [not their real names] both have boyfriends from back home. They don't seem to miss their parents so much as their boyfriends. After Leslie talks to her boyfriend, she flops down on the bed and gets all teary-eyed. I joke with her, but I don't really know how to handle it."

To avoid being alone, some students said they latched onto the first person or group available. "Don't form groups too quickly," warned an Emory frosh, "because you seal yourself off from others who might be the right ones for you."

To some extent, Anne picked the wrong best friend too soon and regretted it later. Unlike home, escaping people you don't like is a hard to dodge problem on campus. There are no parents to answer phones and say you're not home, and you'll probably see the pests everywhere.

On the other hand, don't eliminate people too fast either. Mac's best friend hated him at first. "I'd be visiting his roommate and look at him and think I didn't like his looks. Then I'd look at the pictures

on his desk—all athletic stuff—and figure, oh great, one of those." Later, he started to like Mac during a midnight pie-eating escapade.

Most students reported they didn't have the confidence to not go out on weekends or not hang out with people they didn't like that much until second semester. Some said part of the pressure to go out came from parents. Many Sunday afternoon parental calls began with, "So what did you do last night?"

The Roommate Shuffle

The lull after opening activities allows a second look at roommates. Roommates, who at first shared the same events and schedule, start to separate and make different demands on their space. Opposing sleep and study patterns, clashing musical tastes, different moral values and housekeeping styles begin to emerge.

After perhaps a week of being on best behaviors, roommates revert to type and the roommate shuffle begins. Many schools allow some flexibility in changing rooms and exchanging roommates. Housing or residential directors are usually in charge of switches, but many times students contact their resident assistants first. Some schools prohibit changes, mostly because housing is so limited. Others insist on a two- or three-week shake-out period before allowing changes.

Students warn that administrative attempts to match roommates through questionnaires are often hopeless. Night owls often claim they are morning people to change their behavior or to have the room to themselves in the morning. Slobs swear they are neat to acquire housekeepers. Smokers say they aren't to kick the habit. Many savvy frosh hedge their bets in filling out the dorm forms. One explained, "I'm not interested in drugs, but if I put in I'm against them, I might get some obsessive." He compromised by describing himself as "a mainstream person whose views on drugs, alcohol and sex reflect that." Still, he didn't like his roommate.

Some students said they chose to room with a friend from high school to avoid unpleasant surprises. They admitted that this might limit their ability to grow in college, but decided, with all the other first-year tensions, they could skip this one. Students who were happiest with this arrangement lived with people they knew only casually before college. But most frosh chose to branch out.

Of the 50 students interviewed for this book, two really liked their roommates, most felt neutral about them and two hated them. Roommate horror stories range from a Colgate frosh's slight objection to the sound and smell of his roommate's spray deodorant first thing in the morning to a Wisconsin student's terror of his roommate's hidden gun.

But most conflicts revolved around different personalities and moral-ethical positions. Vibrant Peter got stuck with a dead fish roommate. Proper Kathy was wedged between an apparent Alanis Morissette type and a Valley Girl. Honest Tim tripled with a spoiled phony and a knife collector who operated a still in the room and sold drugs, according to Tim. "Plus," Tim added, "they both snore, are complete slobs and are just physically disgusting people." Anne was uncomfortable with her roommate's attitudes on alcohol and sex. Comparatively freethinking Josh was annoyed by his bible-thumping roommates' orthodoxy.

Little things can improve strained but not impossible living situations. Students suggested a cordless phone or very long phone cord for more private or undisturbed conversations in closets or the hall. Reading lamps that snap onto beds and headphones for private music listening are other boons.

Talking conflicts out and establishing room rules, although good in theory, didn't work well, according to most students. They found that roommates' annoying or antisocial behaviors were so ingrained, they couldn't be changed.

On the other hand, many students said they didn't want to get along that well with their roommates. Kathy said after a few weeks she thought not being best friends with her roommates forced her to go out and find more congenial friends. But, in the end, she still wished for closer relationships with her roommates.

Amy countered, "I've found people who are suffering from [being] too much alike—same major, same classes. Now they're ready to kill each other."

Gretchen and her roommates got along because they were different in many ways but found some unifying similarities. After the first week of wariness, they were talking about where else they had applied and had been accepted and rejected. The schools were the same. "Every week the other roommates and I realize that we are more the same than different," she said.

First Wash

Just as little annoyances among roommates may be piling up, so is dirty laundry. Without a doubt, students claimed the two most important practical skills to bring to college are how to use a computer and how to do laundry. Most students had done laundry at home or had hurry-up lessons the last days of summer.

Michael hadn't quite mastered the fine points when he pinked a white shirt. But Anne was expert enough to advise another Holy Cross student that jamming his dirty clothes into the dryer because all the washers were full wasn't going to accomplish the job.

Label everything and don't abandon your laundry too long in the school laundry facility, most students warn. It may disappear or be dirty again by the time you return. Other keys to clean clothes include amassing tons of coins to operate the machines and realizing that college dryers are expensive and slow working. Some students suggested bringing a drying rack for garments that take a lot of drying time, like sweatshirts and jeans.

For suburban students who were accustomed to free, fast and convenient laundry facilities, the campus wash load may be too heavy. Some opt for a laundry service that usually picks up the dirty stuff once a week and returns it clean and folded the next week. The service is also usually expensive, but some students feel the time saving is worth it. One UVM student explained that using the service was a matter of priorities. She was primarily there to study, and in any time left she wanted to socialize. She also said she tried to compensate for the expense by not ordering out for food so often. On the other hand, other students found doing laundry was a good way to socialize, especially on Sunday night when the laundry rooms were packed.

Homesick

Hectic orientations and busy first weeks allowed little time for homesickness, most students found. But after things settled down, some students felt the loss of home comforts, parental care and privacy. A University of Richmond frosh recalled, "In the beginning, my adjustment was very easy. Then a couple of weeks into

the semester, my roommate got very homesick. That's when I realized I was here to stay for awhile too."

Most especially, there was nothing like a fever to make a frosh ache for home. "I was here for preseason soccer practice, and I fell and hurt my elbow. On top of that, I got sick. My dorm was empty; my roommate and everybody was at practice. I was just lying there all by myself with a 103.5 fever, and I wanted to go home," recalled Kristen. "That was in the beginning and I called home a lot then. I would just call and say, hey. But then I would get upset when I heard their voices. They sounded so familiar."

Amy had a similar experience after a month at school. "I was sick and it was really raining. I came back to my room and I was here by myself. It was damp and gloomy, I just wanted to be home. I remembered what it was like there when it rained. After school my mom, my sister, my dog and I would get on the couch, talk, watch Oprah and eat popcorn. I was thinking about my mom making me dinner, especially since she takes such good care of me when I'm sick and because she's a really, really good cook. Also, two of the girls' parents in the triple next door came up. That made me miss my parents, too."

Another Lehigh student reported, "I didn't realize how far away six hours from home is when you don't have a car. It really hit me when I was sick just before going home for Pacing Break [in October], and my mom couldn't bring me chicken soup. I felt younger than I did when I left home because now I realize what being on my own is like."

Even unceasing fun can make a student homesick. As a Cornell frosh noted, "After a while you're gonna do the same fun things, but they're not as fun anymore. You ease into it, and it's like home. But sometimes I just want to go home because it's more secure. There's a lot to worry about at school."

Not Home for the Holidays

Jewish students observed the High Holidays in September or October in a variety of ways ranging from no ritual to attending Hillel services or even going home. Some students found their campuses had greater Jewish populations than their home towns and were more sensitive to the holidays' demands. More students, however,

voiced surprise that at schools with substantial Jewish student populations, professors may not have given tests during the holidays but often gave exams the following day. "What does he think I'm doing in the time off? Partying?" queried a Lehigh student.

Muslim students too said they found limited understanding and respect for their religious traditions, especially during Ramadan.

School administrators say they are trying, but can only go so far in accommodating religious needs in sectarian institutions. Students, too, acknowledge that working out a balance between religion and work is something they will have to do in real life, so they might as well start now.

First Frosts of October

As noted, early and mid-October are remarkable for the first wave of academic work, increasingly tense social relations and parents visits. The reality of independence and intellectual purpose hits some hard. After the first exams and papers, some students are elated with success and vow to keep it up. Others are inundated by depressing failures or at least a comedown from high school levels and start to question their purpose, value and school choice.

Frequently, that questioning leads to thoughts of transferring to another school. As reported in Chapter 12, Gretchen began to rethink her school choice in October. Like many other students at liberal arts institutions, she debated the old argument between a wonderful general education or vocational training. She loved Wesleyan, but felt a bit guilty about not acquiring technical skills, especially since her education was so expensive.

Gretchen wrestled with choices and compromise. Other suburban students, who also have been accustomed to doing it all—sports, music and honors courses, being popular and smart—may find this winnowing out of what's most important to them difficult. Choices haven't been mutually exclusive before.

Then there's the pressure of what frosh are going to be when they grow up. Undecided is how most frosh enter college. Yet, as they meet other students who are more focused on specific careers such as law, medicine or engineering, they get nervous. Students said that perhaps perfectly innocent questions from relatives about which courses interest them most don't help.

"I was interested in theater and communications in high school," a frosh said. "I knew Emory didn't have a Communications department, but I really wanted to go here. After I got here, I kept looking through the catalog to find a major. By October I hadn't found anything so I thought I'd have to transfer. I even went home to talk to my high school guidance counselor and went searching through her files."

But in March, perhaps not coincidentally when she had a boyfriend, she had come to terms with her own uncertainty. "I'm not thinking about transferring as much anymore. I know I'm going to major in theater, but I promised my parents I'd have a second more practical major. I've been jumping around on that because I like a lot of subjects, but they're not practical. I took a philosophy course I loved, but I can just imagine telling my parents I was going to be a theater/philosophy major! So maybe I'll be a history major and go to grad school."

She added, "I wish I had had a better sense of myself and what I want to achieve as an adult before I came here. Yeah, my dream is to be an actress, but what am I going to do if I can't handle that?"

In contrast, students who arrived on campus totally fixed on majors and careers, may be unglued by low grades, course requirements or competition. Science students suffered most from this. As a pre-med Emory frosh said, "I was thinking [about my courses]—Multivariable Calculus, Chemistry, Biology, Theater. How much of this stuff am I really enjoying? Actually, only Theater. The others I'm only taking to be a doctor. Why am I always looking to my future and not thinking about right now? So many people here are pre-med that there's pressure for the future. They're not thinking about undergraduate school or about general knowledge or wisdom. They are worrying about getting into Columbia or Harvard med school or summer internships for resumes."

He was the last one you would expect to want to transfer. As soon as he was accepted to college, he plastered a giant-sized college decal on his car's rear window and bought every piece of insignia ware. He wanted a rah-rah school, somewhere away from the northeast, larger and more diversified than his small suburban high school. The University of Illinois seemed ideal.

But then he arrived. His dream of total student body support for athletic teams was dashed, first by the high cost and limited availability of football tickets, and, second because political controversy over the team's symbol—a Native American—seemed livelier than enthusiasm for the sport.

In addition, he was an out-of-stater at a school that draws 93 percent of its undergrads from Illinois. In-staters tend to be apathetic about their school, he observed. "A lot of people from Illinois have to be here because of finances or because they didn't get into their first choice," he said. "They come just because it's a good school, although they don't know if they really want to be here."

Without the gung ho trappings of college life, he was unhappy but not miserable. "At first when I disliked it, I wondered if I was just homesick. I found myself constantly wanting to get out of here. I got very homesick about a week or two before Thanksgiving, but I guess that was because I was closer to going home," he said. He also dismissed the problem of adjusting to such a big school from a small high school. "A little school wouldn't have the opportunities I wanted. That would just be high school all over again."

Despite his misgivings, he joined a fraternity and excelled academically, earning a 4.07 on a 5 point scale while taking pre-engineering courses. Still, the atmosphere bothered him enough to visit two other colleges in January with idea of transferring.

He applied to one in February for the following September. Meanwhile, he had grown disillusioned with the Greek system and depledged. He explained, "I found it very restrictive. If you're in a frat, you're not really supposed to talk to someone in another frat or to nonGreeks. I know this is true because I see what my relationship is the with guys in the frat I depledged. Out of 30 or 40 guys, I talk to three now."

By March, he was determined to transfer. "What's weird now is that I don't know where I'm going to be next year. If I could just get that stress out of my life then I could kick back and enjoy myself," he reported.

How will his new choice be different? "I didn't ask the questions or look for the things I'm looking for now? I didn't see what kind of mentality—like about sports and stuff—people had. I should have asked, What do you do here? I should have actually gone to a football or basketball game. The other thing that would be neat is to

take a week during a high school vacation and go to classes more than once to see how it goes day to day. The weird thing about college is once you're in then you know what to look for."

Surprisingly, by May, he no longer wanted to transfer. He hadn't changed his mind about any of Illinois's limitations, but "realized I didn't want to leave my friends. In fact, I hadn't realized how close I had become with people here." He attributed his difficulty in adjusting to "trouble in letting go of high school." After spring vacation at home, he saw his old life more realistically, and found, "It's not this idealized place you imagine at school."

High school counselors confirm that his pattern is typical. They report some vague transferring queries in October, more specific action at Thanksgiving and Christmas. Usually interest wanes during the beginning of second semester, only to resurface in February. But, in the end, most suburban students, who are physically and emotionally healthy and financially able, don't follow through and don't transfer.

Bad Sports

Many students had visions of themselves on campuses with winning teams from football to Frisbee, either cheering from the stands or playing on the field. Sometimes these dreams were based on the school's previous achievements or on nothing at all. In either case, depending on a team record to feel good about themselves and their school was an unreliable standard. Even the jockiest schools have bad seasons. On the other hand, students at Columbia and Northwestern will tell you that longtime losers can turn winners.

Party Time

As an antidote to early and mid-month pressures and second thoughts, many October school calendars end with a bang-up social to cure the blues and promote closeness among students and with the institution. Perhaps the devil-may-care spirit of these events reminds students that despite everything at least they are freer than they were at home. As a senior resident assistant quips

of UVM's Octoberfest, "There's something about drinking and throwing up together than makes for real bonding."

Academic Waves

The second wave of academic pressure that arrives just before Thanksgiving is less of a shock but sometimes more inundating. Work has built up and students are more aware of what's expected academically. Adding to this blue period is the length of time students have been away from home and, in many locations, the gloomy weather.

Kristen described Lehigh's atmosphere, "It rained every day and was so depressing. I felt time was not moving and I was going nowhere. Soccer was over and all I was doing was studying, studying. It was annoying to go out because it was so cold or raining. I was also starting to not get along with my roommate. I was ready to go home, but it seemed like first semester would never end. I knew I was going to fail Calculus and just wanted it over. Around Thanksgiving, I was counting down the days."

On a Tuesday afternoon in mid-November, Amy warily answered the phone. She had just finished taking an exam, had another at 6 p.m. and a 15-page paper due the next day. She felt swamped by work. Earlier this week she had one of those tell-your-mom-how-awful-everything-is conversations. "My mom said, 'I was waiting for this. Just remember, I got a 2.0 first semester and was living at home. You've got so much more to handle.' "

The next academic wave hit in December when many frosh experienced their first finals. Most were impressed with their campuses' serious atmospheres and that almost all students, even those who had blown off classes and other work, studied and cared about final exams. Peter noted, "The two loudest guys were the first ones to enforce the 24-hour silence periods." Libraries were full and stayed open late. Many frosh, such as Amy, who lived in mixed class dorms appreciated the presence of upperclass students to set the serious tone.

Some students said college exams were similar to high school finals. They were used to a study or reading period before exams, teacher-conducted preparation sessions for exams and exams that

covered lots of material. However, most weren't prepared for such long periods before exams during which they might have to study for four exams that occurred at the very end. They also weren't accustomed to the importance of group study sessions. As Kathy admitted, in high school she didn't value group study because she usually knew more than other group members, but at Stanford that wasn't true. Other students mentioned that, although professors sometimes provided exam study guides and study sessions, these aids merely pointed out that the finals covered everything.

What most distinguished college finals from the high school variety was their length and when they were given. The exams lasted from two to three hours, although many students finished before the allotted time. Several students felt being able to leave an exam when they actually finished made college tests easier than high school tests. Finally, they found that taking exams at odd times, for example Peter had some at night, added to the eerie out of time and space sensation of the final period.

Right after exams, many students felt relief accompanied by a new closeness with their fellow sufferers. A Holy Cross student explained, "When everyone was leaving and saying good-bye, you realized how many friends you had made. You're exchanging addresses and things, and it was the best feeling. The coolest thing was we all ate Christmas dinner [before they left] together at a wicked long table. I tried to act blah about it, but I didn't feel that way. It felt like family. I had never been away from my parents for such an extended period so I appreciated the feeling."

CHAPTER

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Beginning Again: January to the End

After several weeks of boredom at home, a cache of clean laundry, some groceries and perhaps an infusion of cash, students returned to campus for the second half of their first year resolved to work and socialize better and more self-confident. For most, the period after Christmas break was a fresh start. But, this time the newness's edge was softened by a cozy familiarity.

Friends at Last

Students came back to friends in January. Most found their real friends by the beginning of second semester. Not that they went friendless until then, but there was a shake out period before they ended up with a comfortable group or individuals.

"At first it was hard to get to know people," reported an in-stater at Wisconsin. "That was weird because in high school I had lots of groups of friends. I mean, you meet people right away, but by the end of the first semester you start to know who your friends really are and who you can count on. When you come back after Christmas, you've had a chance to think. You know the people you want to tell what you did over break."

But some students returned to find friends missing. Some flunked out (at least one intentionally, according to Amy), others failed to receive financial aid and some transferred schools. In any case, their departures left a sadness behind. Sometimes remaining

students felt guilty that they had been unable to help the other students. Others had an it-could-have-been-me feeling.

Reality 101

The flip side of second semester coziness is knowing what is expected academically. Some students, who took relatively light work loads in the beginning, compensated with more and harder courses. Most also realized that assignments mentioned casually in the beginning were actually going to be due before long and that syllabuses were serious.

Amy said, "First semester I wasn't worried about the academics as much as I was [about] fitting in and making friends. [Also] I was taking 17 credits, which was a real mistake. That was overwhelming."

Second semester, she got rid of a ho-hum boyfriend, found a group of friends and limited herself to 15 credits. "I was also taking classes that I was pretty good at. It was a nice confidence builder," she noted.

Amy's turnabout was slow, hard work though. In fact, the first two weeks back were rotten, and the total change wasn't complete until spring.

"In the beginning of the semester I had kind of a crisis," said Mac. "I was having trouble getting myself to study, and felt I had lost the purpose of going to college. Was it really important or was I wasting my money and my time?"

Socially, he continued struggling to find a girlfriend, and felt his friends were depressed also. "It seems like a lot of people felt the euphoria of freedom the first semester, then the reality starts to hit you. You have to study and think of something to major in. The real world is more at the doorstep. Kids are a lot more serious about things. Plus, long distance and early relationships have broken up," he observed.

Like Amy's, Mac's life improved by March. He found a girlfriend and a balance between work and fun. "I decided there are two reasons to be here," he reported. "You learn as much as you can academically and you have a good time. They are both very important and shouldn't interfere with each other. Before I thought they

fought against each other. But now I've come to terms with that and can make myself study and, at other times, let myself have fun."

Jan Plan

Some schools break the second semester's increasing academic tension with different kinds of January sessions. For example, MIT offers the optional Independent Activities Period. IAP is a 3 1/2 week span for students to experiment with phenomena they are curious about but don't have time for during the traditional year. The Institute's facilities are available, and many students view IAP as a chance to play with all the toys in the toy store without having to buy them. Past topics have been as diverse as wine tasting, algebraic topology and sightseeing. Students also dream up courses and get funding to teach them.

Michael enjoyed IAP's "intellectual loafing," explaining, "I went to physics and linguistics lectures but didn't sign up for any formal classes. It was definitely social. Maybe 50 percent of the people come back for some of the month. Of those 20-30 percent do some sort of activity formally. Everyone else is just sort of hanging around and having a good time."

Rushing into Things

Another method of enlivening second semester is offering Greek rush—the process of joining a fraternity or sorority—in January.

Kristen looked forward to returning to Lehigh and participating in the process. Uncertain about joining a sorority before she arrived in September, a few months on campus convinced her it was necessary. "Unfortunately, most activities here [center] around the Hill with fraternities and sororities. If you're not in one, you're kind of left out."

Going through rush is exciting but exacting. Kristen explains how it works at Lehigh: "You only have two weeks to get to know all these girls. There are eight houses. You go to four one night and four the next. Then you get bids back [for a return visit] from the ones who like you. Then you narrow your decision to three. You might not get your first choice so you have to be certain about your others or you're stuck for four years of your life."

Rush exposes a person to the possibilities of acceptance or rejection. As proof of rushees' vulnerability, Rachel Miller, a founder of Reach A Peer (RAP), a hotline for University of Pennsylvania students with personal and academic problems, reported being swamped with male calls during fall fraternity rush and women's calls during their spring rush. Most students claim that delaying rush until sophomore year doesn't relieve tension because, no matter what, fraternities and sororities begin looking over prospective pledges the first year. Even students not participating in rush at some schools are affected. An unaffiliated Emory frosh "felt like an invisible person" during the process.

What intensifies rush's personal risk is that students are selling themselves. Some rushees prepare for it. They study, pouring over Greek information, memorizing names, planning small talk and stocking up on clothes. Others go in cold, hoping they will end up in the right place, and that the house they like likes them back.

A Lehigh rushee said an individual's approach to the process depends on her personality. "I'm outgoing, and knew a lot of girls before so I didn't get the feeling I was being looked up and down. Making small talk was boring and tedious, but it didn't make me particularly nervous. I did see it hurt other people. But I did worry if I was going to offend anybody and if they were going to hate me."

It turned out she, Kristen and others found the much of the process offensive. A Cornell frosh explained, "Rush experience was so lame. I've never been so fake in my life. Like smiling and hi, how are you. It's all so set. First they ask you where you're from, then what's your major. [Later] they ask you where you live at school, how you like school and do you do any sports. I tried to sound interesting and like a great person so I'd ask them some question about their sorority. How many people live here, are boys allowed? They'd go, 'Hee, hee that's so funny.' It was so dumb.

"They knew you were being fake, but they were being fake too. You had to be a little fake at all of them, but the one I was the least fake at, I chose."

A Lehigh rushee agreed. "It's all a big sales pitch. Whether or not a girl likes you, she knows you're the kind of person she wants in her house, so she sells herself to you. After she convinces you to join, it's back to the way she really is. The fact I've come to terms with is that I'm not going to be best friends with everyone

in my house. That's the way things are, but it's such a fantasy during rush."

So why bother? The Lehigh frosh, an only child, said, "I wanted to have sisters. In the beginning I felt like I wasn't close to anybody. Everything was uncertain; nothing was the same at home or here. If I wasn't with my one or two friends, if I lost them at a party or something, I couldn't guarantee that if I left, people there would look for me. Joining a sorority has made me feel so much more secure. The closer I get to my pledge sisters, the greater it is to know I can go out with 20 girls and 15 would make sure I was still there. That's really important to me."

At a large school like Cornell, joining a sorority may appear important as a way of finding a place for yourself and intensifying friendship, said a frosh. She recalled, "After I knew I was in, it made things better. I met more people and felt I was part of something."

After you're in, the pledging begins, and that's demanding too. Hazing—physical and emotional cruelty—does still exist despite efforts to eliminate it. Although none of the students reported extreme hazing, all were surprised by the amount of time, effort and loyalty required by the organizations. A Lehigh frosh explained, "My low point came during pledging. I had three exams and got back terrible grades. I began to question whether or not I should be in the fraternity and what was really important. I wanted to do well in school, and if this fraternity constricted my ability to do that, then it wasn't for me."

Later he discovered, "At my high point I had the exact same exam schedule, three right in a row, and it ended up being the best week. Every grade was close to 90, and it was Hell Week so I had to stay over at the fraternity house. Who knows why."

Hell Week, a period of intense demands by the Greeks of their pledges, often requires cleaning the houses and at least slightly humiliating activities. Kristen found it grueling, especially because it coincided with peak academic demands. Here are passages from her diary at that time:

> March 11: I feel the most homesick I have ever felt. It's Sunday night, and Hell Week has just begun. I just got back from a little break at home and I have two tests on Wednesday. I wish I was back home. I really don't want to deal with

school or my sorority right now. Hell Week is going to be just that. We pledges have to be at the house every day from 8 a.m.–4 p.m. in between classes, and we have to be dressed up every day. Anyway, I feel like crying, but I better go to bed now [because] I won't get much sleep this week.

March 15: Well, I made it! It is 2:15 a.m., and I just got back to my room from our initiation party. Yay! Initiation was weird, but I can't talk about it because it's sacred (confidential). Anyway, I am tired but excited so I had to write. I'm no longer really homesick, but would still like my own bed.

March 16: I got asked to the Theta Xi formal by a really cute guy I didn't even know! It was the first time I have ever been on a date like that, and I had a blast. I went with a lot of my sorority sisters, and it was a really good time.

March 19: Greek Week. Well, I finally really feel like I am in college. It's 1:36 a.m., and today was great. We had opening ceremonies for Greek Week and all the frats and sororities wore togas. We had a parade and after there were BBQs all over the Hill. This whole week is a bunch of activities—pie eating, tug-o-war, bed races, etc. The weather is great and I am definitely no longer homesick. By the way, I got a 91 on the exam I had during Hell Week. I guess I do better under pressure. College is awesome.

Despite rush, pledging and Hell Week, Kristen felt joining a sorority was her best move second semester. At the end of the year, she said, "When I got in, I started doing everything. The house has so much energy. People said, 'Where have you been? You're the greatest person, and we never met you.' Now I have so many friends and feel good about myself. I feel I know who I am, and I'm in a sorority."

Of the ten main students in this book, Kristen was the only one to join and remain in a Greek organization. She and several other students said that Greek affiliation is more significant at certain smaller schools with limited access to other cultural and social avenues. At larger schools such as Wisconsin, affiliation was only one social option, and at some smaller schools such as Wesleyan, a minority belong. In addition, at Wisconsin and many other

schools, the unaffiliated may participate in Greek life, although most admitted the camaraderie was missing.

Several schools—for example, Holy Cross and the Naval Academy—had no Greek organizations. A few others—such as Amherst—have banned fraternities, but some underground organizations still exist. At some other schools—including Colgate and Hamilton—administrations are trying to loosen the Greek hold on social life.

On the other hand, two students depledged their Greek groups. Both resented the fraternity and sorority restrictions on their behavior and the demands on their time. But they also said it was important to have been accepted before they quit. One rueful student said he had had a serious girlfriend who occupied all his social time and hadn't rushed frosh year but might as a sophomore to compensate for not making too many friends first year.

Frosh don't have to join fraternities and sororities to find campus happiness and replace the strong sense of community left behind in the suburbs. Many students found the same social security from other organizations. Sports teams, religious groups, the newspaper, literary or theater clubs, even some dorms (especially those that were part of a school-within-a-school program such as Holy Cross's FYP or UVM's Living and Learning) all provided a special identity and friends in much the same way. The only point that every student made was: join something and do it early.

If you can't find a compatible group, create one yourself. At many schools such as Tufts, activities funds are available for new groups each year.

Finally, students warn: never compromise your basic values or endanger your life to join any group.

The Dark Ages

Following the excitement of a new start comes what is referred to on some campuses as the Dark Ages. It's that period when students realize they are in for a long slough through tough academics, less than luxury living conditions and, at many schools, the dreariest weather. As one Colgate student delighted in exaggerating, "There were 17 minutes of sun from February to May."

The Naval Academy is right on the water, and January is damp and bleak. "It's just really crappy here," Josh said after Christmas break. "I had worked so hard first semester, harder in one semester than in a whole year in Weston. I felt burnt out. I came back and sat down and thought, I've got to start all over again. New professors, new courses. I felt as if I would fail everything because I couldn't concentrate. I didn't want to work at it. Everyone felt that way. My roommate sat at his desk for a good two hours and said, 'I can't believe we're back for more.' "

Part of Josh's problem was that he had done so well first semester. His grades were in the top decile and he had won Plebe of the Brigade, the Academy's top first-year student honor. And now he had a new challenge—he wanted to make jump school, an elite airborne training unit.

At 5:30 a.m. the morning after his return he reported for try-outs. He recalled, "It's cold, snowing. There were about 600 of us there for what we were told were 300 spots. They screamed at us. We had to do pushups, sit-downs. They just went crazy on us for 1 1/2 hours. This went on for four mornings. It was especially terrible because I was just back after Christmas and hadn't done anything physical for awhile. The fourth morning they gave us a physical test: run four miles, do pull ups and push ups. I did pretty well, but I didn't think well enough to get a spot. But they also took into account your rank in class. That really helped me.

"So there was another meeting of those who made it this far. Then we heard there were only 60 spots, and I didn't think I was going to get one. Couple days later I get a computer message that I made it. I was pretty happy about that, made all my plans and told [them] what spot I wanted. I heard a couple months later that the number was cut to ten. My name was still on the list. I crossed my fingers. But when I came back from the break between exams, my name was gone."

Being "dumped by the Jump," as his mom said, was Josh's first big disappointment, and added to the gloom of the Dark Ages. During this time, a bunch of Weston kids visited the Academy and Josh took them on a tour. They were surprised that formerly totally gung ho Josh was less than ebullient. "It gets hard to pick yourself back up after being pushed down so many times," he explained later.

Valentine Heartache

For most suburban students, since first grade and those $3 a box valentines, February 14 was no big deal. But somehow away from home, the formerly Hallmark-holiday took on a greater significance. Falling in the middle of the Dark Ages didn't help either.

Most students wanted to be in love. Some without romantic partners made efforts to not be alone. Groups of young women at Princeton and Lehigh reported eating in convivial bunches and drowning their lovelessness in calories.

Some males who had been drifting romantically decided to make their move. For example, Mac said, "In the middle of January I was kind of looking for someone to go out with. I knew and liked Emily [not her real name], but had this weird feeling I couldn't get together with her."

But by the beginning of February, he decided he and his best friend would go to a movie with Emily and a friend of hers. But Emily "screwed up the plan because she asked me to see the same movie. I asked who else was going, and she said, 'I guess we can get some other people.'"

At the last minute, Mac's friend couldn't go, and Mac ended up with Emily and her friend. He felt awkward, especially when they went back to her room and she said to her friend, "If you left the room, Mac and I would be having wild, passionate sex." Mac said, "She was joking, I think, but it wasn't funny." The other girl left, and Mac and Emily talked on her bed in the dark until 4 a.m.

They did not have sex, and Mac was confused about their relationship. She seemed to be leading him on, yet she also said she didn't want to date anyone who wasn't Jewish, and he wasn't. Besides, he added, "Even if she's willing to go out with me, I'm not sure I want to go out with her. I felt really weird."

On Wednesday, Mac asked her out: "I go over and say, 'I'm asking you out for this weekend, but I don't know what's going on with us. I don't know how to interpret what happened the other night. You can go out with me or not. I'm not putting any pressure on you.'"

Emily said she was confused too, but accepted his invitation.

He worried a bit about his direct approach, since he sensed he may have scared off other women in the same way. "Here I am talking to her about a lot of important stuff, and we've only gone out

once, not even on a real date. But I wanted to confront her, because if we went out again I wanted to know if it was as friends or dating. If it was dating, I wanted it to be like a date." He added, "Kissing makes it a real date."

The next weekend they went out twice. But things got complicated, according to Mac, "At the same time, she's failing all her classes and going through all this stress. I called her a couple of times, and she's crying. I figured some of this was because of me. ... But I felt she wanted to be dating me."

On Sunday, Valentine's Day, Mac presented her with two valentines—one said thinking of you after your operation and the other showed Kennedy missing from his grave. She appreciated the humor and agreed to seriously date him. The odd thing was, Mac wasn't sure it was what he really wanted. "But I figured the last thing she needed was for me to say, 'Sorry, I'm not interested. Things might fall apart for her then, and I didn't want to do that. So I decide to give it a shot for a while. At the same time, I know the Jewish thing is always going to be in the way and is only going to become more of an issue. But gradually I let the good things about her take over."

A month later, Mac reported, "I'm happy now, but a few things weigh on my mind. I'm afraid she's going to feel she's getting too close and she'll back out. She'll say, 'Since I don't want to marry you, I don't want to date you anymore.' but I'm willing to have a relationship with her and fall in love with her. At the same time, I don't know how long the relationship will last. But for now I'm happy."

They made it through the summer and fall, and broke up the following winter.

At the beginning of February Kathy was felt especially uncertain about her place at Stanford. After 18 years of being one of the few if not the only person of color at social gatherings, she attended her first black fraternity party. When she walked in and saw the few white people, she thought, "Fine, now you'll see how it feels." But as she glanced around at the women of color at the party, she still felt like a minority. They appeared older and more sophisticated. She says, "Finally I was where I was supposed to fit in and I didn't feel exactly right here either."

After the frat party, excitement started to build in her dorm for Valentine's Day. As part of the festivities, parents had sent in pictures of the frosh as kids, and the photos appeared on the dorm bulletin board. Valentine's morning, dorm males in jackets and ties were to greet females with roses and escort them to breakfast. That night a dance called Dessert Your Date, characterized by many desserts and someone setting you up with a date, was to take place in the dorm. In addition, tradition held that dates went to a restaurant dinner before the dance. That part was expensive and added to the evening's significance.

Kathy's tension over the dance date was palpable days before the event. She had been crazy about a guy for months, but realizing he wasn't interested in her, was "trying to let go. I had been clean of that person for a month. That's what I call it because he was my addiction."

Just as she felt cured, his roommate wanted to set her up with her old addiction for the dance. Kathy agreed shakily, but later discovered his roommate mentioned the date to him but not her name. Six days passed and Kathy heard nothing. The guy she liked still didn't know she was the date, and he wasn't sure he wanted to go to the dance.

She agonized about pressuring his roommate into pressing him for an answer "because I'm afraid he'll say no. If he says no, I'm really in bad shape because I'll only have a couple of days to find someone else. And I can't go get someone else now, because he might say yes. I wouldn't want to put someone in the same position I've been put in. I suppose it also shows that some of my old liking is still there."

At the same time, Kathy was hurt and angry that a certain male friend hadn't invited her. The guy had used her as a sympathetic listener and advisor, especially about his girlfriend who went to another school. Yet, he seemed oblivious to her emotional needs. Since his girlfriend wasn't coming to the dance, he could have asked Kathy. Meanwhile, with all the dorm hype, Kathy really wanted to go to the dance. "I swear if I don't go, I'll leave campus," she said. "But I don't want to have to. This waiting is wearing me down. I try not to let it take me over, but everybody is going. My roommate's sister—a high school junior—has a date and I don't!"

The familiar situation of being at the mercy of others' actions and not being able to do what she most wanted made Kathy feel like her high school self. She felt powerless and taken for granted—exactly the opposite of the way she hoped Stanford would make her feel.

Two days before the dance, she heard that the guy she liked definitely didn't want to go. Within 20 minutes a male friend (not the ingrate) invited her. They ordered Chinese food and ate with another couple in the dorm rather than going out, keeping the occasion low-key and fun. The dance itself was also fun. But what she most remembers is after. As a member of the clean-up committee, she and six others stayed until 4 a.m., cleaning, eating leftover eclairs and talking. She had found a place for herself.

A Note for Parents

To send or not to send valentines, that is the question. Some lonesome students said getting a card from a parent made them think, "At least somebody loves me." Others reacted, "Only a parent could love me." Use your judgment and know your child before you decide. Some parents hedged bets by sending a humorous card or note. All students said care packages of food, clothes, silly gifts were welcome at all times and especially during holidays.

Weighty Matters

As the weather improved, some students started to shed bulky clothing and notice their newly acquired "Frosh 15." This weight gain added to their feeling of being mired in spring mud, and was especially upsetting for those who planned spring vacations in bikinis. Reduced exercise, increased alcohol consumption, habitual late-night pizza binges and just plain social eating—extended noshing while sitting around a table with friends—accounted for the unwanted broadening college experience.

Avoiding the gain takes effort: play club or intramural sports if you don't make varsity; use the elaborate sports facility that you're paying for anyway; don't drink alcohol; save money and calories by not ordering out for food after meals; rent or buy a room refrig-

erator and stock it with healthful snacks; talk more and eat less with friends.

The Frosh 15 are not inevitable. Of the ten main students in this book, two lost weight sensibly, three remained the same and five (three men and two women) gained weight, although in one woman's case the addition was muscle from weightlifting.

Reasonable concern about weight should not be confused with anorexia, an abnormal fear of weight gain that leads to starvation, or bulimia, the binge-purge eating syndrome. But both disorders are common on campuses because they usually afflict high achieving, well-behaved young women who have trepidations about adult life. Exactly like many frosh. Immediate medical attention and counseling are required in both cases.

Welcome Spring

Something about the smell of spring stirred up good-old-days suburban memories for students, especially after the long winters of northeastern campuses. Coming through the harsh weather also became a metaphor for surviving the difficult beginning of first year.

"One of the first spring days I had the total [flashback] of walking out of high school and into the parking lot," Anne said. So she and some of her Holy Cross friends piled into a couple of convertibles and headed for a park. "We put on T-shirts and sunglasses and thought we'd sunbathe. We get to the park and realize even though it was 70 degrees, there's still two feet of snow on the ground. But we didn't care. We got into the snow, got totally wet, took pictures and went home."

About the same time, another Weston classmate visited Gretchen at Wesleyan. "It wasn't 'till she came that I realized it was completely beautiful and everyone was outside, sitting on the library steps. I had the afternoon off so she and I just hung around, sat on the lawn, gabbed and watched people. I put off studying, but I felt happy and my butt was only a little soggy. At 3:30 I thought about if I was still in high school, right now I'd be at softball practice."

On bleak Cambridge days, Michael found the sky the same unremitting color as MIT's stone buildings. "I got awfully tired of gray, raining, misty, snowy, cold days, and really missed the sun,"

he said. "The only thing the consistently bad weather did was help me with my grades, as it kept me indoors studying."

But even MIT experiences spring. On the first gorgeous day, Michael played four hours of volleyball to celebrate. Then smack in the middle of the fine weather, crunch time hit. He had four tests and four labs due in the last two weeks of April. Volleyball was sidelined for a while.

Making it through the winter, especially at snowbound campuses like UVM, gave students a sense of accomplishment. Amy recalled, "The week before spring break [it] was really snowing, and everyone was 'get me out of here.' After awhile you think you get used to the weather, but the endlessness of it gets to you finally."

After spring break, the weather changed. "I noticed a real change in people too," Amy said. "It was beautiful and sunny and everyone was in great spirits. You could wear shorts. Well, we wore shorts, probably normal people wouldn't!"

The University of Illinois student, who had seriously considered transferring, claimed the improved weather helped change his mind. "I met more people and got closer to a lot of people because they got out more in the good weather. Also, people started to break away from the friends they came here with."

Spring also inspired Mac. "All we [Emily and he] had really ever done was stuff like see a movie or something, so I said we should have a cheesy night, and we did. We watched the sunset, ate dinner, walked around for a while, went to her room and danced, and went out again to look at the moon. I felt, for just that night, the world was right and my life was perfect."

Almost-over Melancholy

Knowing Mac, the bliss couldn't last. "When April got here, I realized that I'd soon be home for four months. I don't want to be there; I want to be here. It lingers in my thoughts an awful lot. Also, the crunch of finals is starting to become a reality for me. I am realizing exactly how far behind I am and what I have to do to get caught up," he noted. "[But] I've had a wonderful April. I'm as happy as I've ever been in my life, and that's why I fear going home so much."

His friends shared his melancholy. One said, "Everyone has heard that nothing is as good as your freshman year. That's why I don't want it to end." Another added, "You look forward to [first year] so much. Your senior year in high school, you're thinking I'm going to do this, this and this, and it's going to be so wonderful. That's why it feels so weird that it's almost over." Both chimed in, "It went so fast."

The inevitability of change struck most students. All the friends, professors, courses and campus events they had worked so hard to understand would be different the following year. "A couple of weeks ago," Gretchen said at the end of March, "I started to think about not being here all summer and not seeing these people. Then I thought about coming back next year and wondering if people will look different. I'm not going to be living near a lot of the people on my hall, and I wonder if I'll ever eat dinner with them or see them anymore. I even started wondering what next year's freshmen will be like!"

Signing up for sophomore courses marked the beginning of the end for many students. Some felt sad. Others were excited and/or scared of going beyond first-year general courses and coming closer to choosing a major and a life.

Coping with this end of year wistfulness, schools often sponsor a school-wide spring celebration. Similar to the October party weekend, it is designed to promote student to student and student to institution bonding. In addition, the last fling is supposed to prepare students to buckle down for finals in a few weeks.

Final Finals

Part of end of the year melancholy was realizing finals were near and knowing, unlike in December, how serious they were. But final finals were also less threatening, as Gretchen noted, "You don't have all that trepidation of what's it going to be like or even how to figure out when they are." Michael actually found his finals anticlimactic and less pressured than his peak work period in April. Having MIT's first-year courses pass/fail helped somewhat. But, as he pointed out, "The professors don't exactly tell you what passing is."

One of the best students in the group, Anne, suffered the most anxiety during finals. She explained, "I had an exam the last day [of exam schedule] and couldn't go to Cape [Cod] Week as most kids do. [At many schools, students have a post-exam tradition of blowing off steam together at vacation spots.] A lot of kids who had finished their exams were just hanging out at school 'till the end, unlike me. So I had to study for my last exam with everyone flipping their beds and packing up."

Anne had the common problem of having one exam on the first day of exams and another on the last, a week later. "It was difficult, and I did panic at the last minute," she recalled. "It was Friday at 9 p.m., and I was sitting in my room alone. My roommate had left on Monday. Half my room was empty, and it was weird. I packed all my study stuff in a bag and said, 'I don't know where I'm going, but I'm going.'

"I found a study room in the campus center and studied for a while but I kept falling asleep, and it was going terribly. I panicked, thinking no one is studying right now but me. I'm not fully prepared and I can't blow it off because it's sociology and that's my major."

In a daze, she went downstairs. "I sat on a couch, sort of studying but more watching people go by. I felt so far away from everyone."

At midnight, she started to meet a friend for pizza, as they had arranged. She waited five minutes, but the friend didn't show. Feeling anxious, she started for her dorm. Other friends passed by and asked her to join them, but she couldn't bear it. She continued to her dorm, tears streaming down her face. She studied a little, until her friends returned to the dorm. A friend slept in her room to keep her company, and that helped. In the end, Anne reported, "The exam was OK. Luckily, it wasn't cumulative."

End Game & Reentry

And then it's over. Exams are taken, overdue book charges and room damages are paid and room keys are returned. Home addresses and phone numbers are exchanged. Promises are made to keep in touch. As noted, many students delay going home by taking a vacation together. Others linger on campus after exams,

"enjoying all the good parts of college without the work," as one student said. Tim stayed on in Boston for a while, taking in the city life and getting an important reentry credential, a haircut.

These students said they wanted time to unwind and bridge the gap between their new and old worlds. As a student noted, "You've been on your own and learned so many new things—not just book things—that you can't be dumped back in the little girl bedroom you left, and you don't even want to explain what happened. Where would you begin?"

Most students interviewed for this book planned to take an indirect route home; only a few did. Somehow, as Gretchen found, after exams they just wanted home.

PART

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Issues

CHAPTER

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Money

Forget the ivy. Money is the real green that impresses, and sometimes depresses, today's suburban college student. Higher education has always been expensive, but now costs are so high that these middle and upper-middle-class students are feeling the pinch.

Along with buying a house, paying for college is *the* major investment for most suburban families. For the first time, many students worried about money. As Kathy discovered at Stanford, "I always knew things were expensive, but I never realized how expensive until I had to pay for them myself."

The cost of a college education has had two major effects. First, as consumers, students and parents, are demanding more for their money. They want everything from excellent teaching, personal attention and career counseling to glitzy facilities, salad bars and free condoms. At the same time, students demand more from themselves because their opportunities cost so much. As more than one said, it's hard to skip a class that costs $50-$70, not counting the textbooks and computer needed to complete assignments.

In addition, parents expect more from their children. Perhaps only half jokingly, many a holiday conversation begins, "How's the country club with books?" As Calvin Trillin, author and father of recent college grads, quipped, parents who want real educational value should dial the New York Times crossword puzzle hotline. There, for 95 cents, you can ask three questions. Any three facts for so little is a bargain compared to college.

But college costs are no joke to those slaving away to study and pay now. Here's how some students coped.

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Gilt-edged Guilt

"I still haven't sorted out a justification for coming here and paying $20,000, other than I'm kind of selfish in not wanting to go to a state school," said a Florida frosh at Emory. "I know I could have saved my parents a lot of money, but I really liked this school. The money is a big pressure. They don't put any guilt on me; I put it on myself. But it's not as big an issue as it was at the beginning of the year because I'm doing well, and my parents are proud." He earned a 3.65 and made Dean's List.

"There's a definite pressure to do well at MIT," said Michael. "It's self-imposed rather than anything else. I would feel really terrible if my family spent that much money and I did poorly or didn't learn the material."

Attending one of the most expensive schools in the country on a patchwork of scholarships, loans, parents' savings and his own earnings, Michael found he wasn't alone. "Money is a touchy subject here because you've got people from such varied economic backgrounds. It's joked about enough that it's probably a sticking point for a good number. People don't discuss it in a serious way. Not like, well, today my debt got up to $17,000. But the idea is always there."

If an MITer should happen to forget the expense, the bursar's office is a reminder in more ways than one. The entry is painted as a giant trompe l'oeil dollar bill that students transformed to $10,000. Perhaps a more current hacker—MIT slang for prankster—will add an 0 for greater accuracy.

Lack of money transformed Michael's year in several bad and good ways. First, he had to spend time straightening out a glitch in his financial aid, resulting from a $2.50 discrepancy between what the Institute was supposed to receive and what his Stafford loan provided. "It wasn't a lot—although I could do almost a load of laundry on it—but you wonder [about the total amount] since about 30 percent here receive Staffords," he noted. Second, he had a school-provided job that paid well and was enjoyable. Third, without extra cash, he stuck close to campus and didn't venture off on expensive jaunts to downtown Boston and Cambridge.

Money, College and Career Choice

Michael didn't feel deprived, and said that money and money-making skills won't determine his major and career. Still, "The idea of making a living does frighten me a little. That someone's going to pay me for what I know is a strange concept. But I'm not worrying about it now. Maybe junior year I'll start."

Meanwhile, Michael planned to major in fairly job-assured electrical engineering and computer science. He also contemplates philosophy or even, wistfully, beach combing. Part of his professed laid-back attitude may be attributed to MIT's prestige and reputation for technical training. One reward of the hard work and high tuition is enhanced job prospects.

Some students attend highly competitive schools with the specific expectation of a good job or admission to a prestige graduate school. A premed frosh said he chose Emory over less prestigious and less expensive schools that offered him full scholarships because, "The job market is very subjective right now. It matters where you've gone to college. You're actually buying a label when you pay your tuition."

What Good Is It? What Good Am I?

Unlike more focused students, Mac hadn't declared a major and was shaken by the high cost of his education compared with his job prospects. "I'm confused and scared about the real world. I don't know what I want to do with my life. On the one hand, I want to do something where I can have an impact on society. On the other hand, I want job security and some kind of job where I can be with my kids and live in a good neighborhood. In either case, I don't know what profession I want," he said.

Expense was a special concern for many students who were uncertain about careers. They hadn't thought about experiences in dollar terms before, but the overwhelming cost of tuition, fees, room and board, made them question what they were doing and their own worth. Money may not have been the entire issue, and dollars may just be a convenient way of measuring value at this life juncture.

For example, a Smith frosh dropped out after a semester. "One problem was I didn't know what I was working towards," she explained. "I wasn't just trying to get a diploma so I could go to grad school and earn $100,000 a year. I found myself in the middle of the first semester burned out, tired of learning things. I had been educated for 13 1/2 years straight, and I still didn't know what it was for."

Surrounded by many driven young women, she was depressed. "There are all these people with life plans: go to an Ivy League school, get an MBA or law degree, get married at 27, start having kids at 30, stop at 33," she noted. She knew there were other "undeclareds" like her, but they seemed satisfied to muddle through. "I was thinking: I'm not learning a lot because I'm not working hard enough because I don't like what I'm doing, but I don't know what I want to be doing."

In December, she languished in her dorm room, trying to figure it out. "I decided if I was going to do that, I could hide in my room at home," she said, and left school. She advised, "If you don't know what you're interested in or don't have a goal, and you're the kind of person who needs to have a goal other than a 4.0 or a degree, you should really think about what you want to do, and possibly take time off before college."

But another student, who dropped out after less than a semester and reenrolled a year later, said he has accepted paying for a degree in something general. "If I thought I could get anywhere in life without school, I wouldn't be here."

The Money Motivation

Money made Gretchen work harder second semester than first. As noted, in December, she toted up the balance sheet of her efforts compared to college costs and came up short. Changing her style, she refused to buy an expensive physics textbook that was also available at the library. That saved money and forced her out of her noisy hall and away from her perhaps too amiable roommates. She also scrawled $157, the amount she figured each school day cost, on her calendar, and looked at it each time she felt like just listening to her stereo.

Anne tried to cash in on the money motivation at Holy Cross. Like other students, she participated in class to get the most for her investment. "When a teacher asks a question, I don't sit there and look around to see if anyone else will answer. I raise my hand and think: Damn it, I have the answer."

But Anne acknowledged limits to her academic ambition no matter how expensive the school. In the end, she wished she had worked harder and hopes that she will next year. "But I know it will be just the same," she admitted.

Pay for a BMW, Expect Performance

Just as students demanded more from themselves, they want their high priced institutions to perform.

An Emory frosh, who chose it over several schools closer to home, said, "I expect a lot from the school. My classes should be small, and I should have one-on-one contact with my professors. I'm disappointed in those 300-kid science classes."

Other students countered that big classes were acceptable the first year, but would be intolerable later. They added that most TAs (teaching assistants who taught smaller group sessions of large classes) were often good teachers and, because they were closer to students' ages, knew how to reach them and were more approachable than full professors.

On the other hand, common complaints were that TAs weren't experienced teachers, didn't speak English well and were preoccupied with their own studies. One Lehigh frosh said of her TA, "I see no point in going to her 7:55 a.m. class. She could just Xerox her notes and pass them out. There's no discussion or participation. It makes me furious. At $69 a class, I'm wasting my time and my parents' money."

The next biggest complaint was not being able to get into desired classes. Popular courses often closed out early, frosh sometimes had last choice in classes and some classes weren't offered every semester.

At small schools like Wesleyan that offer many "delicious sounding" courses and where there's a commitment to keep classes small, the pressure to get in to particular classes is great. One stu-

dent said, "A lot of time you can weasel your way into classes. But it's a question of persistence. I found it very degrading to beg a teacher to let me into a class. I went to the first class of a course I was trying to get into and put on my best show. I don't think I should have to audition to get a class that looks interesting."

Larger schools have problems too. "They have a good number of courses, but you can never get into them," Mac noted of Emory. "They're closed or you need to be an upperclassman to get in. Also, it's a pain to register or to drop/add. It took me a half hour to get through to the drop/add number just to make an appointment to maybe make the change."

Peter felt a lack of help in course selection at behemoth Wisconsin. "I'd say the effort that the school gave in academics for me was next to nothing. They gave me superficial guidance, and didn't look past the basic [requirements]. It was more: Let's just try to get this guy out of here. They didn't look to see what I was having a hard time with. They just said you have to take this, this and this." Later, he reflected that size was a problem, but also, "That's what college is: you've got to do it yourself."

Some out-of-state students, who paid tuition premiums on top of what in-state students paid at state schools, expected more bang for their bucks. Peter wasn't one of them, but he was disillusioned about the economic realities of running a state school. "There was no talk about money cuts," he recalled, "but there was about good teachers leaving for higher paying jobs at other schools."

At his most pessimistic point, Peter complained, "Both of my physics teachers stunk. But I liked my calculus teacher. Then I went to visit him—maybe he was having a bad day or something—but he didn't seem to want to talk. He was, 'Yeah, that's the way you do it.' It was just hurry up and get out. I know they say on the tours that the professors have to have office hours. You think that's cool and that they'll really be able to help you. But they don't."

Money and Control

At college, money also becomes a symbol of independence for students. Raised in sprawling suburbs of distant friends and far away gathering spots, these students have been especially dependent on

parents for such basics as transportation until they can drive. By the time they leave for college, only the oldest have been self-transporting for two years, tops. They have been denied the easy freedom that buses and arcades around the corner provide their urban peers.

Maybe that's why finally being on their own is so important to suburban first years, and why money is significant. Struggling for some independence, most of these students worked summers and/or after school to pay part of the expense. Of the ten Weston students, all had worked, most were paying part of their way and half received some financial aid.

However, those students who relied heavily on funds from home for school strained against real or imagined strings attached to the money. Mac explained his dilemma, "I guess I have a boyish face and easy going sense of humor and manner. But I want to be taken as an adult with integrity, not some cute, funny kid. I want to be independent at college. But I know I'm still being fostered and that my dad is paying for tuition, room, board and books."

Mac compensated somewhat for his babied feeling by buying extras with savings from his former Caldor's salary. "At least I feel that everything I want to do—like [buying] Hawks tickets and going to Mardi Gras—I pay for. I don't have to ask my dad, and he doesn't have to know."

Still, finances were uncomfortable. Mac laid out the money and got paid back when he told his dad about the expenses. Once during the year there was a gap and Mac bounced a check. "It's awkward," he said. "I don't like asking for money. I want to be my own person."

Peter agreed. "It kind of bugs me that my parents are paying for my college. I know they want to and all, but it makes me think, I'm 19 and I haven't done anything with my life yet. All I've done is go to school, worked at Blockbuster and caddied. Big deal. What do I have to show for myself?"

As noted, Peter was so embarrassed about being one of the few students on his floor without financial aid that he claimed he was paying half his way. In fact, when he ran out of credit on his meal ticket in early December, he adopted a self-imposed poverty regimen: "I'd go through the [cafeteria] line and get two pieces of

bread, that's 40 cents. Peanut butter, jelly and tomatoes are free. Then I'd get water. That was my dinner the entire month. For breakfast and lunch combined I'd have two bagels." Making it through the month without asking for more money empowered Peter, and he was proud of himself.

Peter and others were quick to add that their parents didn't mean to control them through money. But the fact of their paying imposed guilt, responsibility and obligation anyhow.

Kristen wanted to please her parents, but she also wanted to take charge of her life with new strength at college. From the moment she arrived at Lehigh, she adopted a strict physical and academic regime. She was careful about her diet, stopped eating red meat, drank oceans of water and exercised regularly in addition to her daily soccer practices. By November, she had lost about 20 pounds. She also did her work and didn't cut corners by skipping optional orientation sessions or any classes.

"I don't know where my discipline comes from," Kristen said, "but I don't want to fall back on anyone."

Being tight-fisted with money was part of her overall discipline. She spurned the lure of clothing and accessories for sale in the student union and ordered out for food only as a special treat. Like overly rich food, prodigal spending revolted her. That's why she remembers the following scene so vividly: "I had the very last final on the very last night. After, I was walking down the hall in the dorm. It was a mess with garbage everywhere. There on top of a trash can were two perfectly good books, just thrown away. One was a brand new psych book, not even highlighted. I took the books, sold my old psych book and kept the unused one for reference. I think I got a new concept of money because I had to pay for what other kids were given."

Like Kristen, Amy paid for her books from money earned at summer jobs. In addition, Amy worked at school and during vacations to pay her phone bill and, eventually, to pay back her dad for half her tuition, room and board.

"That's $8,000 a year for four years," she figured. "It was my dad's idea, and he has a whole written contract of the loan. I sign off for the amount I owe every semester. He says it's like getting a loan from someone else. Come this summer, I'll give him whatever

I want, even nothing, and he subtracts it from the total. At the end of college, I have to pay him back in monthly installments after I get a job. While I'm looking for a job, I don't have to pay. [After that,] I have 10 years to pay.

"At first I was hoping that at the end, he'd rip up [the contract], but I don't think so now."

Money added more stress to an already stressed Amy. "My dad thinks of school in terms of money. Like every time you skip a class, it's a certain amount. I don't think that way. But I don't skip classes because I figure that's why I'm here. I am extremely conscious of money all the time. Every time I write a check or make a withdrawal, I think of summer and what job I can get that will give me the most money."

She emphasized summer earning because she doesn't want to work during the school year. Unlike students who found employment on campus, Amy said her job at a clothing store a distance from campus was a pain.

Amy acknowledged that her financial situation could be much worse. She has the security of knowing her parents can afford college and do provide for her. She was also confident that she will get a job in her chosen field, advertising graphics, after college.

Paying part of her way has added to her all-round assurance. "I make all the decisions [here]," she said. "I pay for everything at school so I don't have to answer to anyone about how I spend my money. I earned it."

Free to Be He

The only Weston student who was totally independent of his family for college costs was Josh. The government paid his way at the Naval Academy, including a $543 monthly stipend. From that, expenses for uniforms, a computer and books are deducted. "I go around and tell my friends to thank their parents for paying for my education," he joked.

But Josh was serious about the implications. He sensed that his parents suffered from empty nest syndrome and wanted to impart the importance of family to him. Yet their need conflicted with his own need to break away. Not relying on their money for college helped Josh because, "I don't totally feel dependent on them. A lot

of college kids figure they have to be nice to their parents because they're paying $25,000 for them to go to school."

Josh knew he traded one kind of dependence for another. "The Academy keeps saying you're getting a free education. But we're paying for it by giving up a good chunk of our lives. It's not just the six years of service after. It's giving up the regular college experience. The government is investing a lot of money in us, and we're paying them back. We're selling our bodies and souls."

Money Monsters

"Where has all the money gone?" was a common lament at Weston High School's college panel in December. Returning frosh reported they had spent between very little to more than a $1,000 on incidentals for the first semester. The amount depended on what students were responsible for paying for, individual styles and differing campus social scenes.

For example, Kristen paid for books, but said her college provided most activities free. Amy, who paid for even more, had additional calls on her fun money because skiing is so popular at UVM, especially when the slopes of choice were in locales like Montreal.

At least Amy knew where her money went. A Cornell student reported, "I've spent a lot. I don't know where it goes. There's always something like a phone bill. You go out on weekends and end up spending so much money." Beer was an expense for many frosh. "And it's not cheap," an Ithaca College student noted of spending about $900 on alcohol and extras. Students, even those who didn't drink that much in bars but went for the entertainment, had to pay $8-$10 cover charges.

Entertainment expenses on urban campuses or schools near cities were especially high. A Boston College frosh estimated, "The average student spends about $100 a week because you go in and out of Boston. That costs a dollar. Football tickets are $40 and everybody goes." Students near Chicago reported the same high price of city pleasures.

Small town and rural college students found ways to spend money as well. A Marietta College frosh said her sorority was wonderful but expensive. "One thing that's really hard is to budget your money. I'm a wreck. I owe money left and right, [including] $200 to

the sorority. I'm always calling home for money. I got a job off campus, and waitress two days a week to survive. Even though I'm on the meal plan, I order out for food a lot. Sometimes you just don't feel like walking over to the cafeteria," she admits. In contrast, at Unity College, in northern Maine and known for its environmental studies, a student said her money went for phone bills and shotgun shells. At schools isolated from large shopping centers, students warn, "Beware the college store." Prices for basics from shampoo to chewing gum were high, and they suggested stocking up at discount stores at home.

Money pressures were clear to suburban students, but the instruments of money like checkbooks and credit cards were fuzzy to some.

Mac, a math whiz, had trouble with checkbook balancing basics. "At the end of the year there was a lot of confusion, and I ended up bouncing my last three checks," he reported. "Somehow my money just disappeared."

Actually, he made mistakes by not recording transactions in his checkbook. "I kept track mentally. That's what I've always done and it's always worked out," he said. But with more transactions and more money at stake, it didn't work at college.

Peter, another excellent math student, also didn't learn to keep a checkbook until his mom showed him how at Christmas.

"I've got a debit card," gushed Tim the first month at Emerson. "It's the coolest thing in the world. It's like a checking account, but instead of writing checks you just use your card. The money is automatically taken out of your account." In fact, the card was so easy to use that Tim lost track of his spending.

Part of Tim's problem was living in Boston, surrounded by music stores, clothing shops, take out food and entertainment possibilities that he had been isolated from in the suburbs. He made up for his depravation and by Christmas, he acknowledged, "I don't have the money thing under control. I'm sliding by and charging lots of stuff. My mother doesn't even know I have [a credit card]. She made me promise I wouldn't apply for one, but they sent it to me anyway. I mean, I'm an 18-year-old kid, what am I going to do, snip it up? Come on!"

Tim held his breath each time the bill came until he discovered he could make a $10 minimum payment. Meanwhile, he was always in debt, and his interest charges escalated.

A credit card is good in the abstract, said Anne, but in reality, "didn't end up being that good." Students with cards often charge group expenses like dinners out with a crowd. Members of the group may hand the charger cash. And, as Anne found, the charger pockets the cash, spends it and is broke when the bill arrives. Of course, sometimes the group doesn't pay on the spot, and it's difficult to collect later. Worst of all, Anne noted, "Sometimes you charge things and forget about them. Like I sent flowers to Kate (her sister) for finals and forgot about it. I had an $80 balance waiting for me when I got home."

What awaited most suburban students at home was the challenge of finding summer jobs. Although, the students appreciated the relative ease of their financial situations—as Mac said, "I know I've got a roof over my head and enough to eat"—they also felt pressure to make money. For some, this tension made summer harder than college had been.

As Tim, who struggled to put together a pastiche of part-time jobs, explained, "Something I didn't foresee that seems very obvious now: when you were in grade school and high school, summer was freedom and school time was work. In college it's completely the opposite. Of course, you're always doing work and having freedom. But at college freedom has the upper hand over the work. But during the summer you're working like crazy to be able to stay there [in college] because of money."

MONEY TIPS

1. Learn how to use a checkbook before you leave home.
2. Practice traditional banking methods such as entering and subtracting every check.
3. Use a bank on or convenient to campus rather than complicating transactions by long distance.
4. Prepare a realistic budget by asking students on campus about their expenses. Meal plans are a discretionary expense on some campuses. Choose a plan that matches your eating style so you don't end up paying for meals you don't eat. However, at some schools the standard meal plan is mandatory for frosh.
5. Some students found that renting or buying an in-room refrigerator at the beginning of the year saved money on junk food. Stocking it with juices and fruit was cheaper and more healthful than hitting the soda and candy machines at night. But some also mentioned that who owned what in refrigerators caused many a roommate fight.
6. To save money on basic supplies, find a friend with a car to drive you to discount shopping centers.
7. Limit credit card use to emergencies. If you do charge, keep a record and remind yourself—even in a silly way, such as posting the amount in large red letters on your mirror—of your obligations.
8. Pay off credit card balances each month.

CHAPTER

Sex, Drugs and Rock 'n Roll Without the Music

Who's afraid of the big, bad college wolves of sex, drugs and alcohol?

Not one of the Weston students said he or she feared these troublesome issues before leaving for college. But they all did to some extent, and admitted it after they arrived on campus and their fears were allayed.

The good news is no one felt forced into doing something she or he didn't want to do. No, they weren't compelled to get bombed every night or hop into bed with the first person of the opposite or same sex to appear.

In fact, most frosh felt less pressure to conform to a cliche of wild adolescent life in college than in high school. Students experimenting with substances or activities for the first time or to a greater degree than they had before did so because they were curious or really wanted to, not because they wanted to fit in. Some said this was because they were more secure in their own identities. Others noted colleges were bigger and more diverse than their high schools and offered companionship and tolerance for all kinds of people and behavior.

The bad news is most students reported they knew other students who did abuse substances at college, and many knew young women who were raped. Many were disgusted with those who drank or drugged themselves into oblivion and, sometimes, out of school. Most were also disappointed in the way administrations

handled accused and convicted sex offenders. Students felt sanctions were ineffective, too mild or nonexistent.

Also, suburban students generally felt out of their league with urban students who seemed more sophisticated about drugs, alcohol and sex. Was this just an assumption of all-those-kids-have-done-more-than-I-have or was there a real difference? Uncertain. What is certain is that destructive behavior associated with drugs, unsafe sex and, especially, alcohol is rampant on most campuses. Here's how some suburban frosh handled it.

Is Bud Wiser?

College students return to high school homecoming football games wearing the T-shirt message, "College is full of so many difficult decisions." They turn their backs and it continues, "So many beers . . . so little time." Other college T-shirts tout coed naked activities from ping pong to lacrosse.

So what's an in-coming frosh supposed to think? Is college all suds and sex?

Yes and no, said most first years. "You see 'Animal House' and those kinds of movies and laugh," recalled a Lehigh student of the cult film depicting more campus testosterone than tests. "You know they're exaggerated and that college can't really be like that. But at the back of your mind you think there's some truth to it." Indeed, more students cited the movie "Animal House" as the fount of their insider college knowledge than any other source, including college viewbooks and guidance counseling.

Reality, the above student found, was somewhat like the movie. Greeks ruled his campus, drinking ruled the Greeks and drinking sometimes led to stupid sex, he reported. He joined a fraternity and participated in the partying to some extent. "It's pretty simple: when you want to drink, you can drink," he said. "Most people who want to be in the mainstream will do it."

But he also concentrated on his studies and earned a 3.58 GPA. He credited his strong suburban high school for preparing him academically, but faults the same environment for his social shortcomings. "I really felt inadequate when I got there. Lots of kids really know how to party there. I felt I didn't know what I was doing."

Just as he prepared for English and math in high school, he says he should have trained in drinking. He said, "Most of the people I was with knew how to control themselves," because they had experimented with their drinking limits before. "I had some drinking experience in high school," he explained, but wasn't prepared for getting out of control a few times at college and hooking up with some young women he wouldn't have approached if he hadn't been drunk. He hopes his younger sister will learn how to drink in high school so "she won't be so overwhelmed by it."

You Don't Have to Drink

Nonsense, said other students of his complaint. Why train for a race you don't want to run?

Anne didn't drink in high school and didn't want to drink in college. She was both amazed at the number of Holy Cross students who didn't drink and that, "The huge thing on campus is drinking; it's overwhelming."

But she stuck to her nondrinking guns, eventually not even attending parties where liquor was available. She explained, "It's possible to go to parties and not drink or just hold a beer, but if the effect of the drinking disturbs you then it's going to be pretty gross. People are going totally berserk, being dragged up the hill, going to the hospital. One night we went to the hospital with a friend, who was sick from drinking too much. Some guy was in a wheelchair and playing the harmonica. Then all of a sudden he picked up the wheelchair and walked away. It was weird and scary. After, a guy came in all bleeding."

Anne's friends were mainly nondrinkers as well. She noted some bias against her and her friends, but said that alcohol wasn't a total divider.

But the school's apparent attitude and treatment of campus drinking was disillusioning, according to Anne. A young woman on her floor was taken by ambulance to the hospital for alcohol poisoning. After she was treated, the college refused to send a car to pick her up. Anne and her friends had followed her in a taxi, and they brought her back to the dorm. "What if we hadn't gone down? She wasn't in any shape to take herself home. What if she didn't have any money with her?" Anne fumed.

Michael felt a division between imbibers and nonimbibers at MIT too. "There is some awkwardness between drinkers and nondrinkers because if someone wants to have fun on a Saturday night by getting drunk, you don't want to hang around them if you're not planning to do the same thing. People aren't usually doing something else and drinking. They're mainly drinking, playing drinking games. I don't think social drinking is really an option. If a person is drinking the purpose is to get drunk. That's all there is to it," he said, adding, "You don't find people here developing a fine palate for wine or something. They're just guzzling beer."

He was surprised at the party aspect of MIT. "I thought going to college would be being with people who were there especially to learn. But I think a lot of people go to college because that's what society expects of them. College education is a great thing, but I'm not sure it makes sense for everyone coming straight out of high school. Unless you really want it, what are you getting? Four years to be on your own and be free? If you really wanted to party for four years, you could do it a lot cheaper somewhere else," he said.

On the other hand, Michael enjoyed a social life and, like Anne, found friends who didn't drink. "Beware the evil college students, for they will tempt you with drugs and alcohol," he mocked conventional advice. "[Actually,] I was pleasantly surprised by the lack of pressure to drink, take drugs. Alcohol was there if you wanted it, but no one cared if you didn't." Also, contrary to lore, Michael discovered not all fraternities centered around drinking, and, at some, there was no drinking at all.

If Michael was unaware of limited social drinking, he had not met the international set, said a Boston College frosh. She joined an international student group and found their alcohol habits congenial. She noted that since they had grown up drinking, alcohol was no big deal, and they felt no urge to get drunk. They went to bars and cafes mainly to socialize and secondarily to have a drink.

It's Just There

Like Michael, Peter discovered a take it or leave attitude about alcohol at Wisconsin, but he chose to take it. He and most of his college friends hadn't been drinkers in high school. But away from

critical eyes at home and interested in trying a variety of new experiences in what they viewed as a safe environment, they got into it. One friend explained, "It's kind of hard to avoid. When you go to a social event, the center of it all is alcohol."

True, but Peter added, "Drinking is not important. It's just there and a lot of people do it." He counted quite a few nondrinkers on his dorm corridor but only one guy who went to class drunk. As a moderate drinker, he said, "I don't believe I'd ever do something so unlike myself that there'd be trouble."

But Peter's friends tease him about a drunken episode. The trouble with drinking with friends and doing something silly is, "They never let you forget it," he noted.

Frosh were impressed by the easy access to alcohol on campus and some officials' ineffectual control of substance abuse. One Wisconsin student noted, "The alcohol policy seems kind of relaxed. Our House Fellow [resident advisor] says just don't let him see it and keep the music down so he doesn't have to come in and catch us."

On the other hand, at many schools frosh were warned by upperclass students that administrators had grown stricter about alcohol and drugs. A Wisconsin student reported, "Kids have been arrested on the hall. They were making so much noise the cops came. They had to go to court and paid a $350 fine."

That punishment seemed fair to Peter and his friends. But they were appalled at the way the administration handled another case. Here's what they reported: A student from suburban Chicago, Peter's friend, roomed by himself first quarter. Then a student, who had been kicked out of another dorm for beating up his House Fellow, moved in. He drank, smoked pot, stayed out all night, slept all day and kept a semiautomatic pistol locked in a drawer. Peter's friend was terrified and mentioned the gun to a friend who told the head of residential affairs. Residential authorities entered the room and confiscated the gun.

The gun owner suspected his roommate had ratted on him. "I played it cool, but I think he knew I was lying. Finally, I couldn't stand it anymore and moved out. After I left, he destroyed the room, broke a chair across the wall, kicked the refrigerator in. The annoying thing was I was the one who had to leave or I could have

waited for him to screw up again for them to get rid of him," he said. "The feeling is the administration resists kicking anyone out."

Liquid Courage and Caution

If alcohol abuse sometimes caused reigns of terror, its moderate use was also touted, although somewhat hypocritically, for easing tensions.

Amy described going to a party and summoning the courage to meet a new guy she liked—the kind of risk she would never have taken in high school. Walking into the party that felt like a meat market, she said, "We walked in as eyes glanced at us. I hate this, I thought, approaching the counter to get a cup of punch. I needed something to ease my self-consciousness." The evening wore on as she "played the social game." A few guys came up to her, "but I was so uninterested in their typical bullshit conversation. So I had another cup of punch." Later, she had another and had enough nerve to talk to a member of the band.

"People our age abuse alcohol, [use] it to get drunk. I mean, I don't abuse it that much. I use it as a tool to loosen up. I know it's not right, but I do it. I'm old fashioned enough to think that when you meet someone you should be yourself. If you have to do something to alter that, it's sad," she explained.

To prevent even greater sadness the morning after, many young women said they always attended parties where alcohol was available with a "designated watcher." The nondrinker for the night kept a keen eye on wobbly friends who headed upstairs or out the door with perhaps less than noble-minded young men. "You're drunk and you don't want to be with this guy in this way" is a typical watcher line.

No Pot Plot

Pot was the drug of preference for students in this book. Some said there may have been others drugs around, but they weren't that aware of them. Gretchen and others were astounded they weren't familiar with the drug culture on campus. They guessed that students who did drugs hung out with others like themselves.

But several other students said that pot smokers were highly visible. A Cornell frosh noted, "A lot of my friends started on pot. A lot. I mean before class in the morning. That turned me off to the whole scene. I tried it but didn't like it. Everyone says it's so great. But the more they say that and the more they do it, the more they just look like druggies. It scares me. But I still think people drink more (than take drugs)." It depends on the campus, frosh reported.

At UVM, Amy found, "Pot smoking is a big thing here. It's the people's choice. It's not just the granolas; it's the cleancuts too. The people who do it really like to do it, not because [they] have to do it to fit in. [But] I don't do it, and don't have a problem fitting in."

Douglas Winkler [not his real name] earned the nickname "Drugless Wonder" in high school. At college, he reported, "I had been hanging out with a certain bunch of people for four or five months. They had been offering me pot, as people had in the past. I would always refuse. They would never, ever push it.

"But I had been thinking about trying it, and talked to my friends about it. One of the arguments for it was this is the time you want to screw around with these things, not when you're settled with a family and job. We also talked about the idea of discovering a heightened self-awareness. That's a little pretentious, I think. It's just a different awareness.

"These people were really supportive of me. You can take a hit whenever you want, they said. But if not, that's cool too. That put me at ease. And I watched them do it, not to drown their sorrows or escape life, but to experience things differently. That was unlike what I had seen in [high school] where drinking was to get so drunk you passed out. But these people were smoking to do interesting things. Now don't think these are scientists or anything. Obviously, a part of it was just 'let's get stoned.' But it went beyond that. It wasn't just to get knocked off our asses, pass out and laugh about it later."

The first time he tried marijuana was two weeks before his birthday, in a friend's room. "I had had 18 years and 50 weeks of no substances so I wasn't used to letting go of my consciousness. I was holding on desperately and getting lightheaded. [His friend] saw that and told everybody to shut up. He talked me through it. It was a good letting go, relaxed but difficult. The whole group, once they

realized I wasn't with them, went beyond being selfish. Everyone waited until we were all together to go on, until I was OK. The group is the important thing."

Two years later he was sorry he had started smoking. Part of his regret was he had wanted to participate in this book by name, but he felt couldn't now.

No Sex, We're Sober

The main motivation of most young women in not allowing themselves to get high from drugs or alcohol at college functions was fear of rape. How realistic was the fear? Of the ten Weston students, three knew of campus rapes and two others had heard rumors.

A Boston College frosh explained: "I won't say I've never had a lot to drink, but I've really learned how far I can go. I'd hear myself giggling too much. Then I'd think, if I have another drink I might get out of control, and I didn't want to take the chance because walking home is a thing here. I wanted to be able to take care of myself."

A Lehigh frosh warned, "I know this is a conservative opinion, especially from a woman, but there are ways to put yourself in a bad situation. You're 18-years-old, you don't know a lot about the school. If you get bombed and hang out at a fraternity house long enough, you're going to look like you want it."

A Walk Means Way More

Most frosh reported their campuses weren't "dating" schools, that they usually went out in groups and then sometimes ended the evening with one person. "Dating—like going out to dinner—is expensive. Who can afford it?" Amy pointed out. The exceptions to group activities were occasions like big dances or formals. When dates do occur, all students said both sexes could initiate them and pay the expenses.

One way couples did hook up was after a party. But many young women said that was dangerous. A primary seduction ploy is, many frosh explained, that a male asks if he can walk a female home. The offer could be an innocent invitation to get to know her better or to protect her on a dark campus, but more likely, as Kristen said,

"When you walk home from a party with a guy at Lehigh, he assumes that you want to sleep with him. That's so wrong. Just because I left a party with a guy once and we went back to his room at the dorm, didn't mean anything. I was thinking we'll just hang out. But ultimately he wanted more. I said, sorry, not interested and left. This was a guy I was really good friends with or thought so. The next day he totally changed. He wouldn't look at me or talk to me. I couldn't believe he was the one to act that way. I just didn't know him well enough to get involved with him. I said, 'Look, just because we didn't hook up or whatever, can't we still be friends and see how things work out?' But I think he felt devastated.

"In a way, it didn't surprise me. Girls can be so stupid sometimes. If I had had one or two more beers, I might have gone along with him. I knew what was going on. But a lot of girls get out of control because they aren't self-confident and give themselves to anybody. This guy was all this great stuff [she lists his physical attributes and athletic teams]. A lot of girls would just have said fine."

Many women grew cynical about men at college. A young woman from a Massachusetts suburb said, "I thought guys would change in college and act more mature. They don't; they're worse." A Cornell frosh reported, "Mostly the purpose of a guy is to get a girl to fool around with. It's really fake when you talk to a guy, especially in a drinking situation at a party. You talk about stupid things and flirt." And when guys asked to walk her home? "I'd say no, and if he persisted, I went to the bathroom and disappeared."

Not When You're a Frosh

Despite the pressure these women described, media reports of widespread sex at college and easily visible signs of campus sexual activity such as the popularity of condomgram booths on Valentine's Day, the students in this book were relatively chaste. Several college health officials said that sophomore year was bigger for sex because frosh were so preoccupied with getting in touch with themselves and finding friends they weren't ready for a serious relationship with another person.

But, ready or not, some frosh had sex. A sexually uninitiated UVM first year was surprised at the number of young women who

talked about having had sex. She wasn't tempted because, she explained, "I don't feel that comfortable about myself yet. How could I be comfortable with someone else?" But after all the sex talk, she was worried and called a friend at another college who reported the same was true there. Feeling out of it, she spoke candidly to a dorm friend, who said, "Don't worry, you're not the only one."

A frosh at Holy Cross was stunned by her peers' sexual experience, especially because they were Catholic. When asked if she thought it might be more talk than reality, she doubted it because she felt there was no reason to prove themselves in that way.

In contrast, a male Emory frosh, who was holding hands with his girlfriend, said he was surprised there wasn't more sex on campus. Another Emory male said he and his girlfriend liked to kiss a lot but that was about it. "As far as my sex life is concerned, it's virtually nonexistent, like it was in high school." Yet, he noted a change in his girlfriend. "She wanted to come across as the kind of person who didn't want to have sex. But I got the impression she would have if I had let it happen. Because it was at college I wasn't surprised."

Students' conservative sexual behavior is noted by some college administrators too. Cynthia A. Shaw, Emory's director of student development, said, "I'm surprised at the reemergence of moral fiber. Saying no to promiscuity, alcohol and drugs is not so stigmatizing. Exhibiting self-control is almost cool. Students seem secure in knowing what's right and not right for them and not compromising their beliefs. The attitude is, 'If you don't like me for that, OK. There are enough people who agree with me that that's not a problem.'"

At Stanford, Kennell A. Jackson Jr., associate history professor and resident faculty member, has lived in dorms for 15 years, and sees lots of innocent romance. He reported lots of hand holding and intimate whispering, "but I don't think they have much of a sex life."

So not everybody is doing it, but some are, and sometimes they embarrass those who aren't. Some students were uncomfortable about couples sharing showers and baths in coed bathrooms. Several students described the difficult situation of a roommate having

or wanting to have sex with a partner while he or she was in the room. Some told roommates this was off-limits. Others just left the room. Most agreed with an Emory frosh, "Having a boyfriend sleep over is rude. I don't mean having sex is rude. But having it with your roommate in the room is."

Many frosh said, although they wouldn't rule out having sex with someone they loved, they were more interested in romance. Mac explained, "In my case, and for a lot of people I've talked to, to have sex with someone is a big deal. You'd have to feel really strongly about someone to take that step. I'd never just have a fling." He added, "I think sex and drinking are going to get more and more conservative."

More Stupid Sex Tricks

Still, a lot of unwise sexual activity takes place on campuses. A Wisconsin frosh boasted, "I haven't been seriously dating anyone yet. But I had numerous one-night stands with juniors and seniors." He continued, "I've woken up several times with someone I don't even know. I've been lucky so far. I kind of worry and then I see the ripped up [condom] package and I'm relieved. Sometimes I get the feeling they don't know me either. But a lot of times, I think they know what they're doing. They wake up, it's 'good morning,' and they give me their [phone] numbers. I usually don't call. I don't know why. I just toss the number in the garbage, and tell myself I'm not going to do that again. But I see a good-looking girl and I'm at it again."

Peter, this student's friend, advised that his behavior is not representative of most first-year sexual experiences. "Jeff (not his real name) is just Jeff," he said.

Too Preppy to Die

But Jeff's capricious protection against sexually transmitted diseases was not so unusual. He said, "I'm surprised sex is so free here. There are a lot of diseases out there and people don't seem to care. I've talked to a lot of people who go bareback [don't use a condom]. They say, 'I'm going to die someday' or 'It's so much better without a condom.'" Someone may be trying to change Jeff's

behavior because he received an anonymous condomgram for Valentine's Day.

A University of Illinois frosh bewailed the benighted attitude about AIDS on his campus. "The feeling here is this is such a preppy place, it couldn't happen here."

The ten Weston students participated in a dating, sex, drugs and alcohol survey at the end of their school year. It was their only anonymous activity for this book. Although their answers may not be statistically representative of all college students, they do indicate the sentiments and experiences of students interviewed here.

Here are some highlights:

1. All reported being heterosexual, but two considered experimenting with different sexual identities at college.

2. Two women found themselves in sexually threatening situations. One male was propositioned by another male who was not a student.

3. Three students knew of campus rapes and two others had heard rape rumors. Several said they took rape precautions but resented the limits on their freedom, such as having to call an escort when leaving the library at night. Four thought their schools did not provide an environment safe from sexual depredation.

4. Two of the ten had been sexually active in high school. One of those had sexual intercourse first year at college. However, that student felt a bit pressured into it by his partner and found it less enjoyable than in high school.

5. Two did not date in college. Six went out in groups and infrequently ended up with one person. Five dated from 1-5 times. One dated more than 15 times. Dating was most frequent in October and January. Two were surprised about not dating more. Three were surprised about dating as much as they did.

6. Three had serious relationships.

7. Four were unsatisfied with their dating situation, three were satisfied and three were mostly satisfied.

8. No one admitted to binge drinking, but seven reported friends who did. Seven had friends who were arrested or hospitalized for alcohol or drug abuse.

9. Four didn't drink. Two changed their alcohol or drug behavior at college, and one of those became more conservative. Three predicted that they might change their alcohol or drug behavior next year.

10. Two of the eight who hadn't tried drugs in high school smoked pot in college.

11. Five thought their alcohol, drug and sex attitudes and behaviors were fairly unusual on their campuses. Most felt other students were more interested in drinking, drugs and sex than they were. One found his peers less interested in drugs than he was.

12. Six felt less sexually experienced than most on campus.

13. Six said a school's alcohol, drug and sexual atmosphere made some difference to the college experience.

14. Six thought their schools were negligent in some areas of drug, alcohol or sex rule enforcement. Five said their schools ignored violations.

SEX, DRUGS AND ALCOHOL TIPS

1. Whatever your propensities—from binging to teetotaling, from chastity to freewheeling sexiness—you will find someone on campus who shares your inclinations.

2. Many gay and lesbians from conservative suburbs found a larger number of similarly sexually-oriented students who were public about their identity and discovered greater general support than at home. But that wasn't true on all campuses. Most students, especially those who chose to come out at college, wished they had known ahead of time the campus level of acceptance or antagonism.

3. Unless you want to, you will not be forced to change your lifestyle.

4. Many students claim college is a safe place to experiment with drugs and alcohol. However, the number of campus accidents and deaths caused by alcohol and drugs and the statistics on unsafe sex and crime resulting from drugging and drinking prove them wrong.

5. Students were equally unrealistic about the threat of sexually transmitted diseases on campus. As early as 1990, the New England Journal of Medicine reported one in every 500 college students was HIV positive.

6. Sobriety is the single most effective rape deterrent.

7. Above all, students said the search for a group of friends and/or same sex friends was more important than finding a sex partner the first year.

8. Administrations are cracking down on crime, including vandalism and underage drinking. Students on campus are not immune from all other existing laws. In fact, local legal offi-

cials may reflect traditional town/gown resentments and punish college students especially severely.

9. Many colleges offer antisubstance abuse programs, and the programs may be mandatory. Substance free housing is available on some campuses. Some students, who may drink a beer or two at parties, choose these residences for their quiet and cleanliness rather than for their stated purpose.

PART

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Was It the End of the World as They Knew It?

CHAPTER

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Yes, It Was the End

In the nine months of frosh year, most students in this book hoped to be reborn in the new world of college. College, they thought, would be everything the suburbs weren't—fun, free and real. But they also worried that it would be more competitive, less personal, with fewer physical comforts and more dependent on their own efforts to get what they needed and wanted.

This new life would require new selves, and they longed to be different. The shy hoped to grow bold, indifferent students hoped to become engaged in learning, the socially insecure hoped to find true friends, the sheltered hoped to enter the real world, the dependent hoped to become self-reliant, the controlled hoped to break free.

Was college the new world and did they change? As in most other life plans, yes and no. Let's start with the yeses.

It Was Really Fun and Exciting

Most students found college more fun than they had ever imagined. The fun ranged from raucous parties and playing touch football in the rain to a few friends stargazing. Mac orchestrated a party during an anthropology lab and some comic bits in the dining hall and elevators. Amy skied in Montreal. Peter played the guitar with friends at midnight. Tim met the Spin Doctors.

For suburban students used to elaborate arrangements for socializing, the ease of many people the same age available for easily accessible activities was a treat. No dozen phone calls and long

drives for fun. Step into the hall and someone was there to do something.

And campuses offered more to do than suburbs. Movies, parties, speakers, performers, athletics and more parties. Students at city schools, like Peter and Tim, found more restaurants, shops and entertainment on a single block than in their entire hometowns.

With such an array of tempting activities, some students struggled to balance academics and fun. After some floundering, half the students found the balancing act manageable, but half said it was harder than they had thought.

For students like Mac, who had never worked hard in school before, the conflict was especially sharp. He felt tense until March when he decided that academics and social aspects were both important. By semester's end, he commented, "I kind of lost that initial feeling of having to get everything out of it. I feel more like this is a good opportunity and I'll take advantage of it. But if I mess up here and there, I'm not going to feel bad about it. After I decided college was supposed to be work and fun, it's been easier to study and not get really uptight about it."

With two exceptions—Michael at MIT and Josh at the Naval Academy—students concentrated on the social aspects of college at least as much as academics, and didn't regret it. Although Peter wasn't entirely pleased with his grades at the end of the year, he was proud that he proved his doubters somewhat wrong. "My parents always told me if I didn't start buckling down in high school and getting used to saying no to fun things, I'd never be able to do it in college," he recalled. "I kind of believed them, but I haven't found it that much of a problem. The thing was in Weston, if I said no to a fun thing, I'd know I had missed out and the next chance wouldn't be coming up for a long time. But here—like tonight there's a concert I'm not going to—there are a thousand things coming up. So I can say no and know I'll have fun real soon."

College students became so accustomed to being surrounded by people the same age and to having accessible fun that leaving campus was jarring. At home, Michael missed college's constant companionship and action. He, who once reveled in the privacy of his bedroom, couldn't stand the quiet and kept coming downstairs to join his family. Despite enjoying the physical comforts of home, all

the students were bored during vacations and missed school, although not the academic demands.

Amy explained, "Before you go to college you think the fun is just being there, hanging out in the dorm. But after you're here, the real fun is doing things." She, in particular, chafed against static suburban life. "At school, we played Frisbee, went hiking, went skiing. Here I have no one to do things with, and I get really antsy," she said.

Like Amy, many students realized the extent of college fun after they returned home. Little instances like a parent's raised eyebrow at a returning college student's attire underlined their loss. Students said what made the smallest pleasures like staying out late, eating dessert instead of dinner or not making beds greater was the knowledge that nobody was watching. One father, knowing his son drank at college, offered him a beer at dinner. The son refused, saying, "It's no fun to drink with you."

Free to Be You

A lot of college fun stemmed from being independent of family and, to some extent, students' high school images. For many suburban students, who had enveloping families and had worked hard to establish impressive public personae to get into college, the release was cathartic. They were former presidents, captains and editors. They were children of the successful and proper. Parents, peers, teachers and other community members expected upright behavior and high performance from them.

Many, like Kristen, looked forward to withdrawing from public responsibilities and spending more time on their private lives in college.

"Let somebody else hold the offices and the gavel for once," Kristen said, and set to work on herself. She stopped being student council president, her mom's little girl, her brother's baby sister and designated driver for more popular kids. Launching an intense program of discipline and self-improvement, Kristen, who wasn't fat to begin with, lost about 20 pounds through healthful eating and exercise.

She also studied in a way that might have embarrassed her in high school. Many weekend nights she worked, despite some pres-

sure not to. "People thought I was crazy, and sometimes I thought I was too. Even though I was always a hard worker, I was surprised that I maintained it with all the distractions available."

Many students noted the line between nerds and non-nerds blurred at college, and that some behavior once considered geeky, like studying hard, was acceptable and often admirable. But why, in particular, was Kristen willing to spurn parties for psychology texts? Because, leaving a secure home and school life, she wanted to create her own independent security. "I wanted to prove to myself that I could do very well, and I did," she explained.

Kristen, like other students, became her own concerned parent, heeding an internal warning voice when tempted to party too much. When her parents advised her to relax about grades, she was stunned. "I wasn't used to that. I was used to somebody saying you have to do this and that. The weird thing is I became that person myself."

While tightening up in diet, exercise, studying and spending money, Kristen loosened up socially and moved from borderline popular to really popular. She joined a cool sorority and dated cool guys. She noted, "In high school I was afraid to go to parties. I thought, 'What if I get caught? What if the principal finds out? What will he think of me?' At college I'm not afraid to go out and go a little overboard. I'm not going to get ejected from student council. My parents won't find out. I can have fun and kick back."

Kristen and others needed the security of college acceptance to escape the confines of old selves. "In high school," she recalled, "I was so busy worrying about everything like getting into college that I didn't have time to think about what I really wanted. Here, I thought about myself, especially when I was running. That's one of the reasons I went every day. It was a time to not think about homework, tests or papers, but where I was going and what I wanted. I wanted no distractions and didn't even run with my Walkman. I thought so much that my run would be over in no time."

Within her own limits, Kristen felt remarkably free at college. Returning home reminded her of the change. "I'm not a rebel, but I'm more of a rebel at college than at home. At home everybody still looks at me as my student council self, but I'm definitely not the same person I was when I left here," she said.

Like Kristen, Gretchen abandoned her civic-minded image. She was "grouped out from high school," and refused "to identify with one group or to commit myself to one thing and just head for it," missing interesting possibilities along the way.

"Part of the liberty that allowed me so much freedom at school was that I didn't need to make best friends. I had them already," she said, referring to Anne and several other high school buddies. "I didn't make a lot of close friends and that helped me to keep my privacy." Defying conventional wisdom, the old friends, all at different colleges, wrote, called and visited each other throughout the year and maintained their relationships.

In contrast, Gretchen noted, "I saw people who were desperate to make friends." These people made elaborate plans to go to breakfast, lunch, dinner, even the bathroom with someone else. Many young women, she found, were painfully dependent on the good opinion of others. As an example, Gretchen was appalled by several anorexic women and by one especially. "She feels she has to be skinny to feel good about herself. That's awful. She's got a lot going for her. She's intelligent, articulate, pretty and fun. But she always asks, 'Do I look fat? Really, do I look fat?' We got sick of saying no. Finally, I said, 'You don't look fat, but even if you did it really wouldn't matter. You'd still be a nice person.' She said, 'Yeah, but then I wouldn't feel that good about wearing this top.'" Gretchen howled in frustration.

Often these socially needy students sabotaged themselves, driving people away by their efforts to gain approval or latch onto others. Since most students were trying to assess themselves and discover some individual freedom, the demands of others annoyed or scared them off. Gretchen, with her commitment to openness and the security of friends at home, escaped the pains of more uncertain students and gained the freedom of a private self.

Note to Parents

Mostly, suburban students felt emancipated from unstated but expected family duties and from specific household chores such as babysitting for younger siblings and cleaning their rooms. So, although college imposed new responsibilities in some areas, they experienced a welcome carefreeness.

While most students gloried in this freedom, some, especially from troubled families, felt guilty about leaving home. Several frosh whose parents were divorced or going through divorce felt they were abandoning home just when they were most needed. In retrospect, these students said they regretted their guilt. Feelings of divided loyalty between home and school hampered their adjustment and success on campus.

The best going away to college gift any parent can give a student is letting go.

However, anything that endangers a child's health is a parental concern. Clinically depressed frosh were especially vulnerable at college. They should be diagnosed and treated before enrolling and continue care at school. But parents of all college students are observing an acrobatic act. They must judge when to let their children fall, when to supply a safety net and when to close their eyes.

Cool and Confident

Despite their bravado the summer before college, students worried they might not be able to handle the work, the social scene and the freedom. But the following summer, each one felt at least satisfied with, and many were proud of, their achievements and adjustment. Those unsatisfied with their behavior in specific areas at times—for example, Tim in skipping too many classes and Kristen in crying to her dad during finals—were confident they wouldn't act the same sophomore year.

Being the best actor in a high school of fewer than 500 students was scary to Tim. Was he really talented? Could he compete in a bigger school that specialized in theater arts? Was he good enough to make a living in the theater?

After his year at Emerson, he said, "I am more convinced than ever that I'm going to be an actor." His assurance came from success. He was one of the few frosh picked for a role in a production first semester and earned three A's second semester in all his theater-related courses. In contrast, he got D's in his two academics, history and English.

And his success felt real. "I've got a nationwide guru of the theater as my teacher. Friends of mine at Michigan and Middlebury

and all over the country are studying her book, and she's my teacher. People have gotten jobs just saying they've studied with her, and I got an A from her. Before I had no solid idea of where I was. There were people I thought would do better and worse than me. But I ended up getting the best grade in the class," he marveled.

With more enthusiasm than ego, Tim said, "I'm so confirmed in becoming an actor that I'm convinced in 10 years people are going to go to Emerson because I went there."

Amy, too, was more certain than ever of her ability and career choice. Like Tim, she struggled with courses outside her field—especially geology—but excelled in her field, making Dean's List second semester. "I know what I'm good at. I've taken a lot of different courses, and the ones I'm doing well in are the classes in my major. If I didn't, I'd have to regroup."

But her biggest boost came from friends. "My confidence has definitely improved since I've been here," Amy noted. "Not necessarily because of guys, but that has something to do with it. When a guy shows interest, you're naturally going to be flattered. But I have to say my girlfriends really make me feel good about myself. Everytime we go out they say, 'Oh, you look so cute.' They say it because they really mean it and aren't afraid to say it. Girls at home would never compliment me. They'd do anything but make me feel good because they looked at me as a threat or competition. These girls do not."

Amy also amended her concept of beauty, including her own. "There are a lot of naturally pretty girls here. But if you think of all of that, you're dead," she said. "I've shown my yearbook to people and pointed out the girls who were considered pretty in high school. They don't think they're that pretty. Now I see I'm at least as attractive as they are."

Armed with supportive friends and an improved self-image, Amy was willing to take social risks at college. For example, the party she stayed late at in order to talk to a member of the band. She had noticed the guitar player at the beginning and mentioned that he was cute to her girlfriends. They urged her to introduce herself. "I never approached a guy like that before," she said. But after they encouraged her some more, she went up to the stage. "I told him [the band] sounded great, and made some other cheesy conversa-

tion. He looked at me, smiled, patted my shoulder and thanked me. That was all."

A friend congratulated her on her nerve and admitted she never could have done it. "But you're the one who told me to do it!" Amy roared.

Magically, after the set, the guitarist appeared at her side and put his arm around her. He asked her to stick around for the next set. She stood near the front to watch. "We made eye contact, and I swear this whole thing was a scene from a movie, he smiled and he has this Tom Cruise smile, and I smiled back as my heart skipped a beat. This was too good to be true."

After the last set, Amy started to retreat to her shy self and thought about leaving without talking to him again. But he found her and invited her back to his house for a party that night. Amy was feeling a little queasy from too much punch and tension and didn't want to go. But she did want him to know she liked him. "Out of nowhere, I still can't believe I said this, 'Well, I would really love to see you again another time.' Then I gave him my number and a hug good-bye."

Later, she observed, "I would never have done that in high school. You just don't meet people like that. Usually you at least know 'of' the person when you meet for the first time. It felt like a test for me. I realized it really does take two to make something happen."

Even though the romance was over in a month—neither one "wanted to make a commitment," according to Amy—her social confidence endured.

Amy and others explain they were more likely to take social risks at college because they cared less about what anyone thought of them. "I tried things at school because I was curious," she said. "I didn't have to worry about my parents and what they thought. I didn't realize how many of my high school decisions were totally influenced by them. Not that I just wanted to make my parents happy, but having them on my side meant a lot to me. At college, I think I have developed my own thoughts. Of course, I do have values from my parents, but the way I think is a lot different. Maybe because I'm young and haven't had a lot of experiences, I'm less judgmental."

Welcome to the Real World

"Weston is still Ozzie and Harriet land," commented a new resident, meaning it's like the 1950's American dream world of TV sitcoms. Never mind that family life was never that perfect, even for the Nelsons. But suburban students often feel they are leaving a sheltered fantasy behind and entering a wider, rough and tumble world where they will launch their real lives.

For Kathy, the urge to "make things happen" as she wrote in her yearbook blurb, was especially strong. After a frustrating summer of straining against family restrictions and years of feeling three strikes against her—small size, gender and race—she was primed for action. Controlled Kathy wanted to break free of her retiring, passive image. Attending a high-power college with a diverse population, far from home, was her chance.

And she did. But not right away and not without effort. As noted, at the first difficult situation—the bike rip-off—she called home for help, and her dad obliged. Almost immediately she regretted it and became more self-reliant or depended on friends' advice rather than on her parents'. She recognized the shift when she dropped a course and told her parents after. At the end of first semester, Kathy also felt empowered when her grades were mailed to her, not to her mom and dad.

Physically and emotionally moving away from home and the constraints she felt in high school, Kathy became more outgoing, assertive and engaged in what she believed was real. Her plan to abandon her shyness worked as she went out of her way to meet everyone in her dorm as soon as possible. She was elected to dorm government, helped run a program for prospective new students, worked with a community service group, participated in a religious fellowship, worked on a campus TV show and was an assistant producer of the dorm musical.

"I really do like being part of the group," said Kathy, who formerly preferred to study alone. "It's like I found my niche at Stanford. I like how I've gotten to know a lot of people as a result of working with them. Several people have told me they're glad they voted for me and respect all I've done. It's like people are finally noticing the short kid!"

The short kid noticed herself as well. Kathy explained, "I used to not like to make commitments. But now I like to have things to do and to have a lot of responsibilities. When I act like I know what I'm doing, people let me take control. I don't have to sit behind and let others take over."

Better than just being the boss, she said, "People still see me as dependable and competent as they did in high school. But more people also see me as a fun person too." Part of breaking away from her Ms. Responsibility role was being part of a smart student body. "I think there are a lot of people like me here, who thought people only saw them for their good grades before. So they are a bit more open to seeing me as a well-rounded person."

Kathy also gained a stronger sense of herself as an African-American. But she didn't want to ally herself exclusively with black students and developed a multicultural array of friends. When a group of students invited her to help start a film society, she was interested until she discovered they wanted African-American films only. She resented other black students waving to her as she biked around campus, assuming an artificial camaraderie that she viewed as racism.

Like Kathy, all students objected to assumptions about themselves and being labeled any one thing. They didn't want to be delineated as just black or white, suburban, jocky, crunchy, fuzzy or techie, conservative or liberal.

As Kathy struggled against others' attempts to package her identity and views, she also relished the acceptance of a more diverse community. "I'm finding friends more like myself," she observed, "I guess because there are so many more people than in high school the likelihood is greater." Yet, attitude was more significant than numbers at Stanford. "Difference is good here," Kathy said. The diverse society is somewhat unreal though, she added, "because of the security, widespread intellectualism and overall harmony." Finding herself more comfortable and less typecast, "I felt free to pick minority students to live with next year because it wasn't just expected of me."

Kathy also discovered more of the economic real world than in her affluent suburb. Stunned by conditions in East Palo Alto, an economically disadvantaged area right next to wealthy Palo Alto, she took action. "I couldn't feel content knowing this exists and

going off to start my life without trying to do something about it." One condition she wanted to change was the situation that made allotting part of the elementary school budget for funerals of neighborhood children who were shot a necessity.

"I didn't feel this kind of community responsibility before," she acknowledged. "I've always known there were people suffering like that, but—this is going to sound stupid—since I've come to Stanford, I realize that I can do something about it."

In addition, the academic work seemed more real. For example, Kathy presented her Public Policy group's project to a Palo Alto grant writing team that could actually win funding for it. She also wrote a paper that required speaking to network TV officials in Los Angeles. That seemed far more hands-on than any high school term paper.

Summing up her experience, Kathy said, "I can get a lot of work done and still have fun."

Like Kathy, Anne welcomed interviewing real people for college research papers and relished a feeling of more tangible accomplishments than in high school. One example was her First Year Program celebratory banquet, the last event of the year before final exams. Known as FYP, the program is a small school within a school that emphasizes joint student-professor involvement on social and academic levels and a total approach to learning. So when the banquet was presented to students as a fait accompli, Anne and her friends felt cheated.

"We found out the faculty was having a speaker. That was fine, but why hadn't anyone asked us to have one too? We're as much an integral part of the program as they are. One professor always said, 'You want something, do it. Don't wait for us to come to you and ask what you want.'"

Anne and her friends took action. One friend called the professor who headed FYP and told him they wanted time for their own presentation during the banquet.

To make the banquet meaningful to them, they organized a huge mural filled with student-donated symbols of the year from footprints to empty pizza boxes. Even some FYPers who had appeared somewhat disaffected during the year, added their heartfelt objects. Along with presenting the mural, they prepared a student-

written poem, a student speaker and student-signed T-shirts for the faculty.

Their efforts were a smash hit. "We got a standing ovation and everyone was crying," Anne beamed. "I think the teachers were totally blown away, and everyone—not just the FYPers—was talking about it the next day. The administration learned about it too, and I heard that the president talked about it when he spoke to some parent groups on Long Island."

Anne was especially impressed with the lasting effects she and the other students had on the school. The mural became a welcoming banner for next year's FYP students and the student-produced banquet may become a tradition. "Things can get accomplished at college," she said with assurance. "In high school, class advisors got things moving. Here you can do it."

Yes, They Could

Like little engines that could, the suburban students made it through frosh year. In the end, most agreed they felt more confident and had handled college well because they had to. They had faced the big challenges like balancing academics and the social scene along with smaller tensions like sharing unisex bathrooms because the situations weren't going to go away. No mom, dad or deus ex machina magically appeared to fix messes. Going through the rough times and difficult situations wasn't fun, but the students' pride in surviving, and often even prevailing, was exhilarating. After coping for nine months, the students were understandably pleased with themselves and filled with the confidence to ace sophomore year.

It was the end of the world, the suburban student found, and as the song says, "I feel fine."

CHAPTER

▼

No, Not Exactly

"Fair and foul are near of kin,/ And fair needs foul...," Yeats wrote. Like the poet's vision of a beauty encompassing its opposite, the first year of college is such a watershed that it incorporates contradictions. More fun and more work, increased freedom and new responsibilities, greater reality and continued sheltered isolation—that was college. It was different from the suburbs and home, but not a wholly new world.

First years found they were amalgams too. They were successful at certain aspects of college and less successful at others. Some excelled at the social but neglected the academic. Others dug into studies and slighted extracurriculars. But most students were a mix of efforts and achievements—scholars one day, party animals the next; outgoing and independent sometimes, introspective and homesick other times.

Another large truth that embraces its antithesis is that students changed. They did expand their minds and vary their behavior. To be sure, some experimented with drugs, alcohol and sex. Those few who went totally overboard, generally, didn't really want to be in college or at the particular college they were attending. More often, student changes were less significant—purple hair, an extra earring or three, sleeping at odd hours or not much. But, mainly these students stayed true to their basic personalities and characters. Along with extra-long sheets, stereos and photos, students packed values from home that they didn't trash at school.

As Amy, who remained stressed despite her vows to relax, said, "College is a chance to start over. Nobody knows you so you can

create a new you." But none of the students did. As Peter explained, "By the time you're 18, you're already who you are."

A Stretch but Not a Break

"It was the end of the kid world," said Gretchen, "but not the beginning of the adult world. College is kind of a mini adult world. You still do partying and have fun and friends, but there is a different maturity level than in high school."

Academics were part of the difference for her. "Just being in a serious studying environment gave me a stretch," she noted. "I'm more mature [in that] I've been exposed to more things, but I'm the same person."

Michael agreed. Scoffing at the MIT insider info publication that touted, "You will emerge in a few years as a totally different person," he countered, "You are the same, you just know more."

Staying the same both disappointed and reassured him. Change, a threat to all comfortable suburban students, was gentle, he claimed. "I was on my own for the first time, had to set my own schedule, pay bills and do laundry. But I didn't find this much different from home." Really, he added with a chuckle, "Balancing a checkbook is a good deal quicker and easier than calculus homework, and a wardrobe of wrinkle-free clothes made laundry a snap. Maybe if I was cooking my own meals, living in an apartment or had actually used the iron I brought with me, I might feel that I was more independent. As it is, I feel like all that's really changed is where I am, not who I am."

Michael explained his biggest relief was, "I didn't have to bend my personality to fit a group," and that drugs and alcohol weren't forced on him either. So, despite his large university and small shared dorm room, Michael remained a self-contained, private individual.

Yet, his relief was also, in part, a letdown. Like many high school Clark Kents, Michael wasn't transformed into a social Superman at college. "Socially, I really am the same person I was in high school. I'm still slow to get to know people, and it takes me a long time to get to a point where I really feel comfortable with someone. I wish I was more outgoing."

Even worse, Michael feared, he may have reinforced his old brainy image. "Balancing academics and social life was easy," he quipped, "My social life suffered." Expanding his technical knowledge had a narrowing effect, he explained, "In high school, I was an interesting person. I ran, juggled, painted, drew a little and did schoolwork. I had even started to learn to knit. In college, all I really did was work and hang around talking. I had no time or space for hobbies. Now I've become a boring person."

Michael was too harsh on himself and unaware of his increased sociability. Yet, the flourishing drunken party life and students who were uncommitted to learning, cut classes and who tested intelligently but acted like nitwits, disillusioned him.

In addition, Michael was somewhat disappointed in MIT. Looking forward to reaching his intellectual breaking point, instead he found only a logical progression from his high school work and itched to put some of his learning to practical use. Like many students, Michael felt college's intellectual elitism created an environment as unreal and insulated as that of the suburbs. In fact, his heavy workload made connections with the outside world like reading the newspaper difficult.

After All, It's Still Unreal

From the first day, Anne noted Holy Cross's physical and emotional distance from nearby urban problems. "I see us up on the hill. We're not in Worcester and we're not really tuning in to what's going on there. I mean, we're aware, but sometimes we, me included, make the decision not to notice." Drawn to Holy Cross by it's community service tradition, Anne adopted a Little Sister from the inner city, spending time with her on and off campus. But her limited involvement only emphasized the gap between the college and the rest of the world. "Sometimes you let yourself slip under," she admitted. "You say, I just have to get through my studies now. I know about poverty, homelessness and all the city problems, but I'll have to deal with them in life after college."

The prospect of such a long wait for real life was hardest on Peter. Starting out as the most joyfully expectant student, he also was the most disappointed by his frosh experience.

By the end of March, he regretted that he hadn't carried out his high school plan to secretly enlist in the Navy. At the time, he was bored with book learning and longed for the Navy's more hands-on education. But he didn't enlist then because his dad, a Naval Academy grad, disapproved.

Peter had endured the last year of high school with the dream that college would be different, providing interesting and practical knowledge that would equip him for his life as a naval nuclear engineer. But frosh year was a replay of his previous schooling, sitting in prerequisite classes, taking notes and exams on subjects that seemed useless.

"Things in college are a lot harder than I thought," he said. "For example, the calculus I'm learning is pathetically abstract. I'll never, ever use it in a billion years. Like trying to find a tangent curve to a plane in an eight-dimensional figure. Who really cares? There is no eighth dimension!" The only interesting course, Nuclear Reactors, "I had to drop because I was failing. Most of the class was juniors and seniors, and I just didn't have the background in physics," he recalled.

Along with his educational dissatisfaction, Peter felt demeaned by his financial dependence on his parents. So the lure of paid, practical work in the Navy was doubly appealing.

During his dad's visit in April, Peter announced his enlistment plan. His dad opposed it. "I was surprised how hard he took it," Peter said, realizing he wouldn't go against his father's wishes. "He couldn't actually stop me [from enlisting]. But he could stop talking to me." And Peter couldn't bear that.

Home for the summer, the usually sunny Peter was unsmiling and dressed in army fatigues. He looked like a soldier back from a war he prepared for but never fought. "The biggest surprise was I didn't learn anything," he said. He criticized the professors, the lack of attention and direction from the faculty and administration and the courses. "The classes were just what I needed to take to get to the next step. I didn't care about them and have already forgotten what I've learned," he said.

He was a bit disappointed in himself as well as the school. "I wish I had been more self-disciplined, especially first semester," he sighed, recalling the clean sheets that often didn't make it onto his

bed, the bills he forgot to pay, the missed church services and the lack of sleep that made paying attention in class a losing battle sometimes. He knows his 2.8 GPA isn't bad and he has been accepted into the Department of Nuclear Engineering, but he and, he added, his dad were hoping for better in order to win an ROTC scholarship for next year.

Peter brightened when speaking of life outside the classroom. "I loved every part of college except for the work," he grinned. He loved being surrounded by people his age and the hubbub of activities. He loved mixing it up with new people and challenging assumptions about himself as typical.

Yet, fighting prejudices was discouraging. Peter found, as did others on campuses where any one political sentiment dominated, that respect for unpopular opinions was theoretical at best. The great openness that liberal groups prided themselves on was mainly reserved for their own causes and didn't extend to conservative views. Conservatives were equally intolerant of opposing views.

But Peter loved entering a somewhat wider world of greater debate and increased interest in national affairs. "What I like about Wisconsin is that it's actually connected to the real world. It's part of a city and doesn't have four walls around it that keep it away from the rest of the planet."

Finally, Peter decided, "I am more aware of outside issues now, and am experiencing a bit of the real world. I'm still in school and not completely independent yet. Maybe junior year I'll move off campus with a bunch of friends. That will be closer to real life. I'm not there yet, but I'm getting there."

A month later, Peter won a ROTC scholarship. "I'm on top of the world," he exclaimed. He had already called his dad, who was on a business trip in London. His dad went to a pub and toasted his son's achievement with a round of beer for everyone. "It covers tuition, books, fees and a $100 a month stipend," Peter bubbled. "Plus, it guarantees me a job in the Navy after graduation." He was closer to real life than he thought.

Too Real

Josh started his first year in the idyllic state that Peter ended his—with a focused purpose and the security of a career after col-

lege. And Josh wasn't disappointed in the Naval Academy's ability to deliver the dream in most ways. The teaching and courses were excellent, he thought, and directly applied to his interests in airplane design and a naval career.

Not only was he preparing for real life, but real life came to Annapolis. President Clinton dropped by for lunch. Former Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher and retired Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff Colin Powell visited too. Josh joked that because of his exhausting schedule he slept through more famous people's speeches than most others have ever been exposed to.

A more serious side to the Academy's real quality was that outside events affected the students. For example, when the military budget is cut, their future jobs are jeopardized. While Congress debates gays in the military, these students will live with the outcome.

Another harsh reality at the Academy was the lack of social life. Preparing for a career was the only goal. Dating and the kind of partying Josh enjoyed in high school were nonexistent. Sometimes he was painfully aware of studying on weekends when he knew his old friends were having fun. "The only way to tell it's a weekend around here is there are more visitors," he commented.

And Josh's ladies' man image was tarnished. After he and his high school girlfriend broke up, she quickly found a replacement boyfriend. Yet, he also managed to find friends among the female plebes.

On the other hand, the Academy's classy image was only a partial reality. Especially after visiting less elegant campuses, Josh was still proud of its appearance. But it wasn't all spit and polish. Like Michael, Josh was disappointed in some classmates. "I came to the Academy with a whole bunch of ideals about a dream culture. That's not as I thought. People are human here. You do see drunken midshipmen falling all over the hall sometimes," he recalled.

As a former auxiliary member of the Varsity Drinking Team, Josh was disappointed in this adolescent behavior that he had accepted, and even relished, in his high school buddies. But he held his fellow midshipmen to higher standards. "When you visit," he noted, "you see 4,000 perfect people walking around in uniform. When you get in you realize they're just 18- and 19-year-old kids right out of high school."

Josh was also unsettled by the mindset of many midshipmen. He had lived in several different suburbs and abroad for a while, but always in highly educated, affluent communities. For the first time, he encountered economically and educationally average people who enrolled in the Academy to raise their standards of living rather than for more altruistic goals.

Many were just trying to get by or assumed they would succeed because of their high school triumphs. "So many people are small town heroes. They may have been captains of three sports and valedictorians, but they never traveled 20 miles away from their homes," he observed. He told of one student who joined the football team and ran for class president as soon as he arrived at the Academy. "Then classes began and they blew him away. His school hadn't offered calculus or anything advanced." He dropped all the extracurriculars and struggled with academics, even then ending up near the bottom of the class.

As noted, Josh was also frustrated by some of the student body's reactionary political views and conservative religious opinions. "So many people here say, 'This is how it has been and this is how it will be and should be.' I'm a little more open to different stuff. After reading about a gay march on Washington, this guy says, 'If the gays just didn't act like gays, everything would be fine.' Give me a break!"

But the biggest conflict was between men and women, according to Josh. The tension peaked at the final rite of plebe [first] year when all 1,100 try to climb Herndon Monument, a 21-foot obelisk greased with 200 pounds of lard for the occasion. The tradition is the first one up replaces the plebe hat affixed on top with an upperclassman's hat, and legend says that the winner will become the class's first admiral.

"Watch carefully," Josh warned before the sticky event. "If a female hand gets too close, it'll be swatted down." The scuttlebutt was the men would never allow the women to outdo them in such a visible victory. So, although women have been admitted to the Academy since 1976 and are 12 percent of Josh's class, they are still denied the gold ring of Herndon's hat. This year the men were especially chary, Josh added, because recent military budget cuts and rules allowing women to fly combat missions threatened their male classmates' chances of becoming "Top Guns."

To counter the student body's antifemale sentiment and to improve the Navy's image after the Tailhook sexual harassment infamy, the Academy has tried to promote and protect women on campus, Josh reported. These efforts, which he saw as too one-sided, were another disheartening first-year element for him. "The administration is trying so hard to back the women that they end up screwing the guys over," he said.

Like many starry-eyed first years at other colleges, Josh expected a world of clear-cut right and wrong but was struck by the mutability of truth. "There's hypocrisy in how the administration deals with some issues," he said. "We have a book of regulations that thick. Basically, you can look at it and find where you can do one thing and look at another place where it says you can't. There is also some stuff that isn't written down purposely but can be enforced." Like students at less structured colleges, Josh was disappointed in the administration's seemingly chameleon behavior sometimes.

Yet, amid these certain and uncertain rules, Josh excelled. He earned a 3.76 GPA and won the prestigious Plebe of the Brigade award. Honoring the top plebe in the class, the award recognizes outstanding performance in military training, athletics and academics.

Initially delighted with the award, by year's end Josh somewhat regretted it. "The whole thing wasn't such a great idea because it singled me out," he explained. "There's no way I could stand up in front of 1,100 classmates and say I'm the best. There's no way I was. I had to do little things to make me seem less good, like sleeping during the day and practical jokes."

Later, he added, "It's been more good than bad, but I wish they didn't have the award at all."

In the End, You Have to Want It

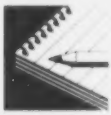
All these discoveries about college sound defeating, but they weren't. The first years in this book faced the difficulties, coped and survived.

But not every student makes it through first year. Those who flunked out weren't necessarily less intelligent than those who didn't. Along with clinically depressed students, generally, they were

students who didn't want to go to college and hadn't really thought about what they did want. They automatically went on to higher education after high school because their friends did and their parents and communities expected it. Some attended colleges they didn't want in the first place. Students pressured to pick their parents' choice in schools, those attending colleges by default because they didn't get into the ones of their choice and athletes recruited by inappropriate institutions were part of this group. Those who struggled hardest had never before made decisions or handled problems by themselves. In all cases, these frosh would have benefited from a year of work or untraditional education and living on their own.

On the other hand, the most successful frosh got involved in campus life. They made friends, committed themselves to an activity or organization, and connected with at least one adult (professor, administrator, coach, etc.) on campus. They risked being rejected, seeming foolish, trying something hard or different and making mistakes with a nothing-ventured-nothing-gained attitude, and mainly they gained.

But successful and unsuccessful frosh shared a common regret about frosh year. "The biggest thing is how fast it goes," remarked a Lehigh sophomore-to-be. "You look back to when you had a babysitter and she was in high school. 'Man, she's so old,' you thought. Then suddenly you're in college. I sit up at night and wonder, 'Where has it all gone?'"



YES AND NO TIPS

1. Frosh year is such a large experience that it is both the end of the world as suburban students know it and a continuation of their old world.

2. Yes, students can change in college, and no, they usually just evolve naturally from their former selves.

3. Many students headed off for college seeking a place of perfect freedom, equality and wisdom. Indeed, they found increased personal and intellectual freedom, a more diverse society based on merit and, generally, a higher level of academics. In this Eden, they expected to blossom into everything splendid they weren't in high school and at home.

4. But students found both college and themselves imperfect. Freedom was limited by institutional and social rules and by students' own inner obligations. Although parents were absent, their influence was felt long distance.

5. Like society as a whole, student bodies exhibited prejudices and exerted social pressures, albeit different and more subtle than those in high school. Cliques still existed but were broader and more flexible. As Josh observed, "Let's face it, a nerd is still a nerd." No campus was truly integrated, partly because some minority students chose to be self-segregating. African-American and Asian students in particular were torn between blending into the general population or exclusively aligning themselves with their own racial groups. Some minorities resented the instant presumed kinship among their own members. Many other students felt thwarted in their efforts to make friends with minority students and felt more pessimistic about race relations after frosh year.

6. Academically, college wasn't totally different either. There were good and bad teachers, interesting and boring classes. Students were dumbfounded that cutting class counted in some colleges too. Most students felt surrounded by smart kids. The safety net of a few slow students at the bottom of the class disappeared. Yet they also saw hard work count for more than genius in classroom achievement. In general, suburban students felt prepared for college work, but not quite as well-prepared, they thought, as prep school or large urban specialized school grads. The main difference in college work was the amount and level of reading required, most students said. But a few found ways around the reading, such a skimming, using a friend's notes, or one reported, "just b.s.ing."

7. Many students didn't find their metiers after a year. Exposed to introductory courses in several fields as diverse as economics, psychology, music and biology, these students remained uncertain about what really interested them and what they wanted to be when they grew up. The focus of others—for example, some premeds—made them anxious and self-doubting.

8. The high cost of higher education added to this anxiety. Spending over $100,000 for an education and not having a specific career goal was unnerving. Students felt pressure from home to perform well in school and to prepare for remunerative careers. At the same time, relying on parents for money hobbled students' independence.

9. Dorm life was also no great liberation. Housekeeping duties like doing laundry to have a pair of matching socks and cleaning off the top of a desk every once in awhile to locate important papers still existed. More significantly, responsibilities to roommates and friends (definitely not necessarily the same) were more conscious efforts than breezy relationships with family and old friends had been. Making friends—the single most important goal for most frosh—demanded self-examination and group considerations that students took for granted in high school but had to work at in college. "The thing that was most on my mind, aside from studying," Anne said, "was

feeling that I was constantly sitting down with people and working things through. It wasn't shocking, but I didn't expect it because that's not the way I functioned back home."

10. A final letdown was that college authorities were no more perfect than the parents and high school personnel they succeeded. Administrators based some decisions on money, and didn't always provide the right classes or morally and politically correct environments, frosh said. This was despite the fact that colleges are best served by retaining students, and most work hard to do so. In addition, many students complained about room size or the lack of school-sponsored fun activities. Surprisingly, few carped about bad food, only about the monotony of the meals. Students also protested larger issues such as unsafe campuses and some administrations' seeming acceptance of or failure to take adequate action against racism, sexual harassment, drug and alcohol abuse and homophobia.

11. Frosh learned self-reliance, and were satisfied with their experience in direct proportion to how much they handled themselves. Much of that handling was discovering helpful people and services on campus, everything from learning centers to psychological clinics. With a little help, they made it, and you can too!

PART

■

End Notes

Ten Biggest Frosh Regrets

1. Pairing off with one person too quickly.
2. Not going home for Thanksgiving even if college was far from home.
3. Relying on parents too much.
4. Not knowing about and taking advantage of what the school offered, including everything from entertainment to psychological services. Students said they should have read the school paper and bulletin boards and checked the dean's office.
5. Not dropping impossible classes.
6. Spending too much money and using credit cards unwisely.
7. Being too idealistic about college and expecting too much from themselves.
8. Not participating in a sport.
9. Studying in dorm rooms rather than in quieter places such as libraries.
10. Not participating fully in orientation and meeting as many people as possible immediately.

Ten Biggest Frosh Coups

1. Attending all classes and doing assignments regularly.
2. Actively participating in any group—a team, government, theater, the Greeks, or even an antigroup group.
3. Taking academic and social risks such as trying a class outside a student's usual interests or becoming more outgoing than in the past.
4. Doing a small act of kindness for someone else or yourself.
5. Establishing and keeping to a budget.
6. Caring less what others think and more about what you value.
7. Giving people and the school a chance by being open to ideas, styles and routines different from a student's own.
8. Relaxing about your mistakes, and expecting beginning snags such as bad rooms and roommates and bollixed schedules.
9. Making efforts to correct problems and becoming your own advocate.
10. Staying in shape through exercise and proper diet.

Best Things to Bring or Buy at College

1. Lots of underwear and socks.
2. Telephone with long cord or cordless phone.
3. Something homey—a favorite quilt, pictures, stuffed animals, rug.
4. Refrigerator.
5. Bike.
6. Earphones.
7. Fan.
8. Coins for laundry and a drying rack.
9. Lamp appropriate for reading in bed.
10. A lockable container for valuables.
11. Plastic tote for bathroom necessities.
12. Shower thongs to avoid athlete's foot.

Best Things to Leave Home

1. Bad attitudes and feelings of entitlement.
2. Conventional assumptions and stereotypes.
3. Firearms and explosives.
4. Expensive jewelry.
5. Old romances.

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